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MAKENNA GREEN
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SILENCE OF THE LIMBS: DISMEMBERMENT, FEMALE BODIES, AND LITERARY PIECES

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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY

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Dr. Rita Keresztesi, Chair

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Dr. Kimberly Wieser

_____
Dr. William McDonald

_____
Dr. Amit Baishya

_____
Dr. Roksana Alavi

For my loving mother, Kenetha Nell Jackson Green, in memoriam. Thank you, Mom.

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Table of Contents

Abstract

Using a postcolonial, feminist approach grounded in psychoanalysis, this dissertation focuses on novels that feature dismembered bodies of women. Some particularly profound twentieth and twenty-first century novels written by female authors portray dismemberment against the female body, and, through examining the role of the body in power structures, these female authors demonstrate how strong female characters resist oppressive structures through the terrible fragmentation of their bodies. Dismemberment is a horrifying, incomprehensible reality that marks and mars the body, leaving physical, mental, and emotional scars that many women bear as they face oppressors who are seeking to abuse their bodies, silence their voices, and rip them apart, limb from limb. Nevertheless, these stirring literary pieces demonstrate how women use the body as a means of resistance, however gruesome and graphic that resistance may be. Forms of physical dismemberment pervade neo-slave narratives, such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979). Also, dismemberment becomes an important theme in Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975) as women fight to the death for gender equality. Moreover, social and emotional dismemberment color the pages of Marie Elena-John's novel *Unburnable* (2006) as racism and perception produce deathly consequences, while Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) and Denise Chávez's *Face of an Angel* (1994) depict the dismembering of the past and the re-membering of the future. A study of these novels elucidates an understanding of the conditions inhabited by women across a vast and varied landscape of experience and reveals their incredible strength.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Dismemberment

A woman's body appears on the screen. She is naked, tied to a tree, and disemboweled. Her head hangs down on her chest. Marked by her murderers, her body bears scars that live on in her decaying flesh. The sight of her limp body is horrifying. In this scene from *The Walking Dead*, a popular television show premiering on cable television in 2010, the horrific sight of a brutally dismembered woman signals impending doom for the characters who discover her.[1] It is not just her death that instills fear; it is the realization that someone has physically removed her organs from her body that creates a horrific reality for those still living, those still in possession of the parts now stripped from her corpse. She projects the horror of dismemberment onto the screen. She becomes the face of dismemberment. She is dismemberment. After all, the word *dismemberment* itself certainly indicates "the act of depriving of members or limbs, or of dividing limb from limb,"[2] and much fiction paints in bloody detail this act, depicting physical dismemberment that absolutely rends the body to fragments. While the act of dismemberment quite literally severs one part of the body from another, it affects the entire body at the same time that it attacks its individual parts.

Dismemberment not only indicates a severing of limbs, but also the "division of a whole into parts or sections, so as to destroy its integrity."[3] That the body possesses a

[1] "Try." *The Walking Dead: The Complete Fifth Season*. Writ. Angela Kang. Dir. Michael E. Satrazemis. AMC, 2015. Blu-ray.

[2] "Dismemberment, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2014. Web. 1 September 2015.

[3] "Dismemberment, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2014. Web. 1 September 2015.

living, breathing, functioning entirety, an "integrity," is its strength and weakness simultaneously. At the same time that individual parts allow the body to function, to have an integral composition, these parts also render the body vulnerable to attack and exposure. The body is susceptible at the very points that work to construct and sustain its framework, the parts, since one part can disrupt the holistically operational processes of the system. Dismemberment uncovers those parts, and, whether or not it produces death, it leaves a mark on the body. Marks left by varying forms of dismemberment may differ in their effects on the body, but we still tend to view dismemberment of any kind as anatomically offensive to the structure of the body, particularly intentionally inflicted dismemberment. The spectacle of the mangled female figure in *The Walking Dead* is so horrifying because her dismemberment is not a natural occurrence. It is not some kind of birth defect. It is not a surgery she has allowed doctors to perform. It is not even the result of a deadly disease like cancer. Her dismemberment comes at the hands of human beings. People with bodies, organs, and beating hearts cut her life from her body, organs, and once-beating heart, one piece at a time. Moreover, these living people do not put a bullet in her brain; instead, they literally tear her body apart, limb from limb. Not only is she dead when we see her, but she is also brutally exposed. Inside becomes outside; bowels become skin; life becomes death. While death separates life from the body, dismemberment separates the body from the body. In her book *Horrorism: Naming Contemporary Violence*, initially published in 2007 as *Orrorismo ovvero della violenza sull'inerme,* Cavarero calls this physical separation a direct offense to the body itself, an offense that the body cannot accept through any reaction except horror. Discussing the offensive nature of dismemberment, she says, "The body

is revulsed above all by its own dismemberment, the violence that undoes it and disfigures it…The human being, as an incarnated being, is here offended in the ontological dignity of its being as body, more precisely in its being as singular body (Cavarero 8).

While acknowledging the corpse as a reminder of the fragile veil between what is living and what is dead, Cavarero points out that dismemberment pushes the boundary between the revulsion that one can accept as a natural process and the horror that accompanies an unthinkable state of the human body. She asserts:

> What is unwatchable above all, for the being that knows itself irremediably singular, is the spectacle of disfigurement, which the singular body cannot bear…the physics of horror has nothing to do with instinctive disgust for violence that, not content merely to kill because killing would be too little, aims to destroy the uniqueness of the body, tearing at its constitutive vulnerability. (Cavarero 8)

If the corpse "preserves its figural unity, that human likeness already extinguished yet still visible, watchable" (Cavarero 8), then the living being can view it as a specific line that demarcates death from life. However, dismemberment dismembers that "figural unity," bloodies and blurs the line, leaving us to question not just our individual "condition as a living being," but also "the human condition" (Cavarero 8). Regarding dismemberment, Cavarero states, "What is at stake is not the end of a human life but the human condition itself, as incarnated in the singularity of vulnerable bodies" (Cavarero 8). Viewing the loss of *a* life through the corpse is revolting, but seeing the obliteration of the body at the hands of another body is a complete manifestation of the horrifying.

Although it resurrects a cultural fascination with images of scarred bodies that disintegrate limb by limb, *The Walking Dead*'s unthinkable depiction of a dismembered woman is certainly not a new concept. In his significant article "Necropolitics" (2003), Achille Mbembe discusses the historical fascination with violence to the body, remarking, "Well known is the long process of the condemned through the streets prior to execution, the parade of body parts—a ritual that became a standard feature of popular violence—and the final display of a severed head mounted on a pike" (Mbembe 19). Decapitation, parts on display—death by severing becomes an absolute spectacle. Mbembe notes many historical examples of bodily violence that have permeated various social contexts, such as Nazism, concentration camps, the French Revolution, slavery, colonization, apartheid, modern warfare, and even suicide bombers. Each form of the implementation of death he discusses results in "*the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations*" (Mbembe 14). As bloody and horrifying as history presents itself, it is interesting to note the proliferation of violence and images of violence in the world of popular entertainment. Although life is full of terrible images of violent tragedies, such gruesome depictions of a dead or dismembered body find a place in mediums designed for hours of sheer entertainment. In today's entertainment industry, it is not uncommon to see television screens filled with images specifically associating dismemberment with women. From cultural phenomena like *The Walking Dead* to animated children's classics like Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, women's bodies often become the centerpiece of the unfolding narratives. A mauled woman in an apocalyptic plot or even the beautiful poisoned princess in a coffin serves as a turning point in the story.

Fear, sadness, horror—all of these emotional realizations culminate in the sight of the dead woman's body. However, it is not just the body of the victim that conjures up a sense of fear and repugnance at the sight of an unnatural death. For example, in the story of Snow White, the dead princess, the epitome of all that is good in the film, is an abomination to behold, but the Evil Queen is horrifying in and of herself. Near the beginning of the movie, we see her hand the huntsman a box, a box meant to contain the heart of Snow White.[4] She commands the huntsman to dismember the body of our beloved princess and remove the beating heart from her singing breast. Besides her evil intentions, the Queen's body is also a site of horror as her body transforms before our very eyes. In her magical lair, she concocts a potion that suddenly begins changing her queenly visage into that of an old woman with a crooked nose and a chilling laugh that sends shivers up our spines and prompts us to consider what would happen if the Queen turned her evil gaze upon us, the helpless audience fearing for Snow White's life. The Queen, already a frightening figure because of her incredible jealousy of Snow White, morphs into something even more frightening: a deadly witch capable of poisoning the beautiful Snow White. Inhabiting the body of the monstrous villain we can barely comprehend, she carries out her deadly plan, handing Snow White an apple that causes her to grab her neck and fall to the floor.

In terms of horror, images of dismemberment and women's bodies have permeated narratives before Disney ever brought the story of Snow White to the animated screen in 1937 and long before *The Walking Dead* began thrilling audiences with zombies, bodies, and women portending doom. Before the invention of the

[4] *Snow White*. Dir. William Cottrell and David Hand. Perf. Adriana Caselotti, Harry Stockwell, Lucille La Verne. Walt Disney Productions. 1994, VHS.

television screen, the female body has a history of being associated with horror, whether playing the instigator or victim. Even in Shakespeare's seventeenth-century *King Lear*, female characters, Regan and Goneril, come to the forefront of the play as women of horrific proportions. In a well-known torture scene involving Gloucester, Regan's solution to Gloucester's insurrection is a simple one: exercise power over his life. She advises, "Hang him instantly" (3.7.4). However, the rival sister Goneril comes up with the winning plan: "Pluck out his eyes" (3.7.5). Once Cornwall has removed the first eye, Regan calls for the quick dismemberment and removal of the second.[5] The violence proposed by these women stirred quite a response from audiences shocked by the act of physical dismemberment performed before the very eyes of audience members. In his well-known analysis of Shakespeare's plays in *Shakespearean Tragedy,* A.C. Bradley describes the violence of this scene, noting, "The blinding of Gloucester on the stage has been condemned almost universally; and surely with justice, because the mere physical horror of such a spectacle would in the theatre be a sensation so violent as to overpower the purely tragic emotions, and therefore the spectacle would seem revolting or shocking" (Bradley 251).[6] Like Bradley, Joseph Warton suggests in his review of the play in *The Adventurer*, Samuel Johnson's periodical, that "the cruel and horrid extinction of Glo'ster's eyes…ought not to be exhibited on the stage" (Warton 83).[7] Samuel Coleridge likewise expresses some hesitation in dealing with the

[5] Shakespeare, William. "King Lear (Conflated Text)." *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus. 2nd ed. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008. Print.

[6] Bradley, A.C. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1960. Print.

[7] Warton, Joseph. "Joseph Warton on *The Tempest* and *King Lear*." *The Critical Heritage: William Shakespeare*. Ed. Brian Vickers. Vol. 4. New York: Routledge, 1995. Print.

extremity in this moment of the play. Regarding Gloucester's blinding, he asks, "What can I say of this scene? My reluctance to think Shakespeare wrong—and yet—necessary to harmonise their cruelty to their father" (Coleridge 102).[8]

Why does the scene provoke such emotional responses of revolt in male audience members who would have already been accustomed to seeing various depictions of violence in combat, murder, and even war? These well-known reviewers and critics of the time appear to suffer such shock from a scene too terrifying to behold on the theatrical stage. However, it is interesting to note the female presence in this tortuous blinding of Gloucester, the king's faithful servant. Both Regan and Goneril contribute to the dismemberment Gloucester suffers, and Regan even remains present in the royal chamber that is acting as torture room. Both daughters of the king want to punish Gloucester for his actions, and they will proceed over a performance of blinding dismemberment. In *Horrorism,* Cavarero notes, "The mythical constellation of horror has a decided predilection for female faces" (Cavarero 25). While images of men have certainly shaped our perception of violence, Cavarero argues that images of women come to the forefront of the literary imagination as particularly terrifying because they project fears born from the "misogyny of the patriarchal imaginary" (Cavarero 14). Fear becomes associated with the absence encapsulated in the female body. Noting the feminine association with fear, Cavarero says:

> As in every theater of violence that we know of to date, men continue to be the unchallenged protagonists. But when a woman steps to the front

[8] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Coleridge's Criticism of Shakespeare*. Ed. R.A. Foakes. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989. Print.

> of the stage of horror, the scene turns darker and, although more disconcerting, paradoxically, more familiar. Repugnance is heightened, and the effect is augmented as though horror, just as the myth already knew, required the feminine in order to reveal its authentic roots. (Cavarero 14)

This "patriarchal imaginary" concerns phallocentric fears of the female body rooted in the psychoanalytical realm. In his famous explication of the "castration complex," Freud posits his theory that, for a male, castration encapsulates the greatest fear in life; for, in becoming a woman, he would become that which is without existence. In his essay "Fetishism," Freud identifies the "castration complex" as the fear that males have regarding the reality that "a woman does not possess a penis" ("Fetishism," 21: 153).[9] For Freud, the significance of the phallus, the non-female organ, is twofold. First, the phallus serves as a marker of sexual identity, which supposedly derives its meaning from the sexual organs, or more specifically from the penis or lack thereof. Identifying the phallus as the ideal sexual organ desired by children of both sexes, Freud asserts, "The assumption that all human beings have the same (male) form of genital is the first of the many remarkable and momentous sexual theories of children" (*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 7: 195). Freud calls the awareness of one's possession or lack of the phallus the "most significant portion" of a child's development of the narcissistic self, for the realization of its presence or absence manifests itself in the castration complex experienced by both sexes ("On Narcissism," 14: 92). For the male child, confirmation of his possession of the ideal organ results in

[9] All references to Freud's works come from *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, translated by James Strachey. 24 volumes.

the anxiety surrounding the fear of possible loss, while its absence in female children results in "envy for the penis," of which castration has robbed them (*Three Essays*, 7: 195). Second, the phallus, in addition to its formative role in infantile sexuality, also carries with it a tremendous significance that persists into adulthood. In "The Infantile Genital Organization," Freud asserts that, in contrast to his previous claims explicated in *Three Essays on Sexuality*, the "approximation of the child's sexual life to that of the adult goes much further and is not limited solely to the coming into being of the choice of an object" (19: 142). In addition to the development of libido projected onto a sexual object, the period of infantile sexuality also produces a "dominating significance which falls little short of that reached in maturity" ("Infantile Genital Organization," 19: 142). Freud says,

> At the same time, the main characteristic of this 'infantile genital organization' is its *difference* from the final genital organization of the adult. This consists in the fact that, for both sexes, only one genital, namely the male one, comes into account. What is present, therefore, is not a primacy of the genitals, but a primacy of the *phallus*. ("Infantile Genital Organization," 19: 142)

Approaching gender and sexuality from this phallocentric perspective, Freud suggests being female, or having female genitals, is merely a "substitute" for the male sexuality. Freud's primacy of the phallus becomes representative of the ideal, and differentiations from this ideal are not just grounded in difference, but in deviations. Freud maintains that these deviations, when recognized by the male child, threaten the security of his own prized possession, for, in recognizing that the "woman does not possess a penis,"

he realizes that a loss of the ideal is possible ("Fetishism," 21: 153). Through the importance of its presence in determining sexuality, the penis becomes a recess of latent fears for males since its loss would signify a lack of primacy previously possessed. The fear arises from the idea that "if a woman had been castrated, then his own possession of a penis was in danger; and against that there rose in rebellion the portion of his narcissism which Nature has, as a precaution, attached to that particular organ" ("Fetishism," 21: 153). The superior male organ must at all costs be protected against castration, or the deviation of the ideal.

Taking up Freud's phallic cross, Lacan argues that the phallus is a symbol of more than just male genitalia; **it** plays a signifying role in the acquisition of language. Arguing that "what the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole structure of language" (Lacan, "The Agency" 1290), Lacan combines the Freudian theory of castration anxiety and the moment of acquisition of language in a child's life to explain how the unconscious speaks. In Lacanian theory, language becomes possible after the child has first become aware of the "Ideal-I," or his or her own existence as a separate self, through seeing his or her reflection in a mirror (Lacan, "The Mirror Stage" 406). By recognizing the fact that one's own existence is separate from that of the "Other," which usually manifests itself in the form of the mother, the figure who typically represents to the child the possession of "the 'privilege' of satisfying needs" (Lacan, "The Signification" 1307), the child enters into the stage of knowing the world only in terms of self-recognition through its "triumph of assuming the image of one's body in the mirror," a stage that Lacan terms the Imaginary (Lacan, *Écrits* 55). However, while the moment of mirror reflection in the Imaginary ushers the

child into a narcissistic awareness, it "establishes the watershed between the imaginary and the symbolic in the moment of capture by a historic inertia" (Lacan, *Écrits* 54). The child moves into the realm of the Symbolic when he or she recognizes that language acts as the law prohibiting an incestuous relationship with the mother, the first "Other" on which the child's desire solely depended. It is through the stage of the Symbolic that language forms through the child's acquisition of signifiers that provide, in Saussurean terms, sound-images for the signifieds, or concepts of the Imaginary (Saussure 272). Lacan recognizes the phallus as the signifier that ushers language into the order of the Symbolic, while the lack of the phallus represents the signified, or the female body. Personified as a father who breaks the bond between mother and child, or self and desire, language prevents the child's belief that "the desire of the mother *is* the phallus" and wish "to be the phallus in order to satisfy that desire" (Lacan, "The Signification" 1309). Lacan states,

> For the phallus is a signifier, a signifier whose function, in the subjective economy of the analysis, lifts the veil perhaps from the function it performed in the mysteries. For it is the signifier intended to designate as a whole the effects of the signified, in that the signifier conditions them by its presence as a signifier. (Lacan, "The Signification" 1306)

In other words, the phallus acts as a construct by which meaning arises. Following Freud's thinking that the phallus signifies the meaning of two conditions, one in which the phallus exists and one in which the phallus does not exist but has been castrated, Lacan sees in castration the key "that gives to the signifier/signified opposition the full extent of its implications; namely, that the signifier has an active

function in determining certain effects in which the signifiable appears as submitting to the mark" (Lacan, "The Signification" 1305). In addition to placing importance on the psychoanalytically dismembering effects of castration, Lacan also stresses the significance of dismemberment itself as a developmental process in the Imaginary and Symbolic orders. Dismemberment, or fragmentation of the body, remains at the core of Lacan's explanation of his stages. During the mirror stage, or what Lacan calls the "watershed" between the Imaginary and Symbolic, one recognizes a reflection of the body in a mirror. However, this reflection, though it enlightens an understanding of the self, or ego, is not the true body; instead, the image we are perceiving is yet another object. According to Lacan, "What is involved in the triumph of assuming *[assomption]* the image of one's body in the mirror is the most evanescent of objects, since it only appears there in the margins: the exchange of gazes" (Lacan, *Écrits* 55). What we see in the mirror is a projection; we cannot actually view the body all at one time. When we look at the image in the mirror, we are seeing the image, not the actual body. We do not have the ability to look at the entire body at one time; instead, we can look at a hand, or a foot, or even toes. Nevertheless, we cannot see our own faces or eyes or nose; it is the medium of the mirror that allows us to accomplish such a feat of seeing our entire body from head to toe. With our own eyes, we see the body in fragments. Elucidating on this phenomenon, Lacan states:

> To pinpoint it in the mirror stage, we first have to know how to read in it the paradigm of the properly imaginary definition that is given of metonymy: the part for the whole. For let us not forget that my concept envelops the so-called partial images—the only ones that warrant the

> term “archaic”—found in the analytic experience of fantasy; I group those images together under the heading of images of the fragmented body. (Lacan, *Écrits* 55)

The “fragmented body” arises from these “partial images,” images which must serve for the whole. The limbs we see with our eyes, the parts that form our understanding of self and the body, become the body. However, in spite of the metonymic process that allows us to perceive individual parts as constitutive of the “whole,” images reminding us of that fragmentation continue to surface. These resurfacings can manifest themselves in the forms of fantasies. According to Lacan’s explanation,

> This development is experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the individual's formation into history: the mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation—and, for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an “orthopedic” form of its totality —and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure. (Lacan, *Écrits* 78)

The idea of this “fragmented image of the body” becomes important to Lacan’s discussion of both identity and the “fantasies.” First, he locates within this stage of fragmentation the rise of the individual, calling this process of recognizing one’s image the inheritance of “an alienating identity” determining one’s position as a subject. Second, he refers to fragmentation to explain latent desires and fears resulting from the

acceptance of the "fragmented image." Fragmentation of the body continues to manifest itself in various forms in the psyche of the individual. One manifestation of the "fragmented image" is in dreaming. Lacan notes the dismembering nature of these dreams, saying,

> This fragmented body…is regularly manifested in dreams when the movement of an analysis reaches a certain level of aggressive disintegration of the individual. It then appears in the form of disconnected limbs or of organs exoscopically represented, growing wings and taking up arms for internal persecutions. (Lacan, *Écrits* 78)

In these dreams, dismemberment involves the presentation of dismembered limbs and bodily organs, capturing the fear associated with the possibility of ultimate fragmentation of the body. Not only does this aggressiveness appear in dreams, but it also plays a role in the images, the "imago," which Lacan equates with "instincts" (Lacan, *Écrits* 85). Lacan states:

> Among the latter images are some that represent the elective vectors of aggressive intentions, which they provide with an efficacy that might be called magical. These are the images of castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, and bursting open of the body—in short, the imagos that I personally have grouped together under the heading "imagos of the fragmented body," a heading that certainly seems to be structural. (Lacan, *Écrits* 85)

"Castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, and bursting open of the body"—Lacan addresses an entirely horrifying list

of the possible "imagos of the fragmented body." These images not only epitomize the aggressiveness embedded in the "instincts," but they also show themselves in certain social situations where the aggressiveness of this fragmentation surfaces in language. For instance, Lacan gives an example of children's various habits of play involving some kind of imagination of the possibility of dismemberment, saying, "One need but listen to the stories and games made up by two to five year olds, alone or together, to know that pulling off heads and cutting open bellies are spontaneous themes of their imagination, which the experience of a busted-up doll fulfills" (Lacan, *Écrits* 85). An unbelievably dismembered victim on *The Walking Dead* is just one of many pictures to add to "an atlas of all the aggressive images that torment mankind" (Lacan, *Écrits* 85). The dismembered woman is a "busted-up doll" for all to see. These images of aggression, fragmentation, and types of dismemberment are not limited to the formation of the ego during the mirror stage of the Imaginary: they also exist in the development of the super-ego. Melanie Klein addresses the fears of dismemberment that can foreground the child's development during the oedipal conflict in its early stages of development. For Klein, the fear of castration and of its effects does remain at the core of development, but the images of dismemberment are not confined to the development of the ego. Referring to the fear built into the structures of the super-ego, she calls it a "tyranny of a super-ego which devours, dismembers and castrates and is formed from the image of father and mother alike" (Klein 75). Klein argues that, for female children, dismemberment manifests itself in the lack of a part, for "in the castration complex of girls, so in the femininity complex of the male, there is at bottom the frustrated desire for a special organ" (Klein 74). Regarding the development of male children, Klein

emphasizes dismemberment as a heightened anxiety regarding not the castration that has occurred, but the castration that could occur. She says,

> The boy fears punishment for his destruction of his mother's body, but, besides this, his fear is of a more general nature, and here we have an analogy to the anxiety associated with the castration wishes of the girl. He fears that his body will be mutilated and dismembered, and amongst other things castrated. Here we have a direct contribution to the castration complex. (Klein 74)

During what Klein calls the "femininity phase," the father can assume frightening proportions as possible castrator or dismemberer. There is "an intense dread of castration by the father...It is upon his penis that the dread of castration by the father is focused in this phase" (Klein 74). However, while the father can assume a role of frightening, dismembering figure of the super-ego, the mother can occupy an even more formidable role in the child's development. Klein, arguing that the fear associated with the mother is much greater than that of the father, asserts,

> The dread of the mother is so overwhelming because there is combined with it an intense dread of castration by the father. The destructive tendencies whose object is the womb are also directed with their full oral- and anal-sadistic intensity against the father's penis, which is supposed to be located there. (Klein 74)

According to Klein, the super-ego represented by the mother simultaneously represents the threat of the father, for the mother's body is already castrated. As a representation of castration, the mother is horrifying since she bears the absence of the

dreaded wound. In addition, the mother figure can also serve as a threat because she poses as a source of bodily frustration. Klein suggests,

> In this early period of development the mother who takes away the child's faeces signifies also a mother who dismembers and castrates him. Not only by means of the anal frustrations which she inflicts does she pave the way for the castration complex: in terms of psychic reality she *is* also already the *castrator*. (Klein 74)

Embodying castration at the same time that she threatens to perform it, the body of the mother doubly represents absence. Her body marks an absence, and she inflicts absence. This absence, embedded in the fear of castration, comes to the forefront of psychoanalytical development, as well as linguistic realization in a patriarchal narrative. Through dismemberment, the feared, absolutely dreaded absence becomes unavoidably, painfully apparent. Regan and Goneril are so terrifying because they participate in inflicting an absence on the male body; they seek to remove Gloucester's eyes from the sockets, leaving him blinded and castrated of all manhood and dignity. Similarly, Cavarero, also commenting on the power of this female-centered absence as a frightening image embedded in the psyche, names one of the most horrifying images found in mythological accounts: Medusa's bodiless head. She also considers a significant aspect of this example, saying, "Medusa belongs to the female gender" (Cavarero 14). Referring to her as the "figure who constitutes the incarnation of horror in Greek mythology," Cavarero considers Medusa to be the supreme example of what horror looks like at its most horrifying ends: the dismembered body (Cavarero 8). Seeing the head of Medusa obliterates any attempt to disguise the "traumatic sight" of a

wound. While she is not a threatening mother capable of committing castration, she is something even more fearful: she is castration itself. Of Medusa, Cavarero suggests that the "stereotype of the female that sees the uterus as the vessel of all ills…functions in reverse in this case" (Cavarero 15). She is not the castrator. She is castration. She is absence. She is dismemberment: "Through the traumatic dislocation of the maternal belly outside the frame, Medusa, among the mother of ills, is a sterile mother. She doesn't generate horror…In her severed head, directly, she incarnates it" (Cavarero 15). She is the wound, open, bleeding, and incapable of reattachment. Medusa occupies a place in mythology for the element of horror; however, she is not alone in this category. In addition to referencing the decapitated woman, Cavarero also cites the Greek figure Medea as an equally horrifying image, for Medea does not embody the effects of dismemberment but rather distributes them. In the account by Euripides, Medea is responsible for slitting her children's throats, slicing her brother into parts, and instigating a plan involving the dismemberment of a king (Cavarero 26). Medea plans, performs, and produces dismemberment. She is a horrifying fulfillment of the role of castrator. Medea, a dispenser of the dismemberment Medusa embodies, inhabits a representation of the threatening, castrating, dismembering mother, the "infanticidal woman" (Cavarero 26). At the same time that the female presents the "horror of castration" in a patriarchal narrative of psychoanalysis, she also assumes a role of motherhood. While the figure of Medea may assume frightening aspects in the phallocentric construct because of her role as this transforming mother, it is also noteworthy to consider the nature of the act she commits directly against her own children, her own reproductions from the womb: murder. Infanticide is a particularly

horrifying form of killing since the murderer is the mother, the child's first Other, the figure who typically represents to the child the possession of "the 'privilege' of satisfying needs" (Lacan, "The Signification" 1307). Cavarero addresses the horror of infanticide from the perspective of the vulnerable body. While dismemberment reveals and takes advantage of the "constitutive vulnerability" of the body at its points of weakness, infanticide preys on the vulnerability of the child. Cavarero argues that built into vulnerability is the element of care, for "[b]y necessity, the vulnerability of the infant always summons her [the mother's] active involvement" (Cavarero 24). In the case of Medea, the mother not only capitalizes on the vulnerability of the body, which she tears to pieces, but also refuses to provide the care necessary to the sustainment and well-being of the child. While Medusa and Medea, these two women of horrific proportions, share an association with the "dismemberment of the body, canceling its uniqueness and reducing it to flesh without figural unity" (Cavarero 26), Medea's dismemberment seems all the more unbearable for its wounding made evident in the body of the very child for whom she is supposed to be caring. Her act "demonstrates here that its aim is to destroy the vulnerable, indeed the helpless, going so far as to undo its corporeal singularity in the early years of life" (Cavarero 26).

Medusa and Medea are not the only deities presented as monstrous. While Cavarero traces a tradition of horrific women to origins of Greek mythology, authors like Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga demonstrate that an examination of female dismemberment in religious systems should not be a Eurocentric exercise. These authors highlight patriarchal influence on the construction of deities in Indigenous American belief systems. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987),

Anzaldúa notes the example of Coatlicue, an Aztec deity viewed as a monster because of her power to control all life and death from her womb. While Anzaldúa praises her maternal qualities, the goddess nevertheless stands as a figure of horrific dismemberment. Beheaded, Coatlicue possesses a pair of snakes in the place formerly occupied by her head while claws serve as her hands and feet. Moreover, a necklace of human body parts adorns her neck. Dismembered and dethroned, Coatlicue becomes a representation of the frightening mother whose body can both nurture her children and destroy them. Responding to the dismemberment of their goddesses, some Chicana authors have begun the process of re-appropriation through turning dismemberment into a conduit for women's liberation from the body. In these cases, "Monstrosity and dismemberment here pave the way for insight into the nature of the soul and the healing of the social wound—*la herida abierta*" (Hartley 190). Rather than portraying her as horrifying, Anzaldúa positions dismemberment as an opportunity for agency in her "reconstruction of *Coatlicue*, the monstrous earth mother deity of the Azteca" (Hartley 190). Anzaldúa notes that prior to "the change in male dominance [in the Aztec mythology], *Coatlicue,* Lady of the Serpent Skirt, contained and balanced the dualities of male and female, light and dark, life and death" (Anzaldúa 54). Although the Aztec system replaced her with a male god, *Tetzauhteotl Huitzilopochtli*, upon its enjoinment with the Mexitin ideology and consequential promotion of the male god as controller "of the religious system" (Anzaldúa 54), Anzaldúa restores her to primacy, venerating her as "the mountain, the Earth Mother who conceived all celestial beings out of her cavernous womb" (Anzaldúa 68). She "gives and takes away life; she is the incarnation of cosmic processes" (Anzaldúa 68). Commenting on a statue of Coatlicue in the

Museum of Natural History in New York City, Anzaldúa notes the artistic dismemberment of the goddess (Anzaldúa 69). However, for Anzaldúa, Coatlicue's missing parts present no disabilities; rather, they become opportunities for something more powerful to take their place. Describing the beauty of Coatlicue's body, she focuses on the majesty of the goddess's form, saying, "She has no hands. In their place are two more serpents in the form of eagle-like claws, which are repeated at her feet…Hanging from her neck is a necklace of open hands alternating with human hearts (Anzaldúa 69).

In addition to Coatlicue, her daughter, Coyolxauhqui, serves as another example of a dismembered deity. Aztec goddess of the moon, Coyolxauhqui suffers dismemberment at the hands of her brother, Huitzilopochtli. In painful details, Cherríe Moraga, in *The Last Generation: Prose and Poetry* (1993), tells the story of how Huitzilopochtli beheaded his sister and chopped her body into pieces, leaving the goddess in only fragments of who she once was (Moraga, *The Last Generation* 73). Using Coyolxauqui as another example of this reclamation of female identity, Moraga engages in a process of female re-appropriation in her version of the story of Coatlicue and her daughter, Coyolxauhqui, the "Aztec moon goddess [who] was dismembered by her brother, the Sun god Huitzilopochtli" (Martinez 40). Though replaced and mutilated by a patriarchal system, Coatlicue and Coyolxauqui stand as important foundations of identity for Moraga. In *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness: Writings, 2000-2010,* She says, "It cost me a great deal to find their stories, but without my gods—Coatlicue, the mother of creation and destruction; Coyolxauqhi, her dismembered daughter…without these icons of collective MeXicana sedition, my criminal acts as a

Xicana dyke writer would have no precedent, no history, and ultimately no consequence" (Moraga, *A Xicana Codex* 95). Moraga views these goddesses not as broken pieces or remnants of former glory before patriarchal takeover; rather, she sees these female deities as the very pieces that compose her own history and allow her to write with a purpose. She almost glorifies the dismemberment, looking at it as something beautiful, something freeing. Suzanne Bost writes that Moraga "provides an almost sensual account of Coyolxauqhi's mutilation" in *The Last Generation* (Bost 90). In retelling the horrific account of Huitzilopochtli's murder of his sister, his "cutting off her head and completely dismembering her body," Moraga meticulously details each step of the process, saying, "Breast splits from chest splits from hip splits from thigh from knee from arm and foot" (Moraga, *The Last Generation* 73). Even the uninterrupted listing of the body parts suggests a continuous motion of breakage, isolating each part of her body as a link in the chain. However, in her version of Coyolxauqhi's beheading, Moraga does not conclude her rendition with the goddess in pieces. Although dismembered, Coyolxauqhi "becomes the moon"; although "banished to the darkness," she shines as "la diosa de la luna" (Moraga, *The Last Generation* 73). Moraga refuses to acknowledge the patriarchal murderer as victor; instead, she explicitly says, "Huitzilopochtli is not my god" (Moraga, *The Last Generation* 74). For Moraga, it is Coyolxauqhi who deserves her praise, for she "is la fuerza femenina, our attempt to pick up the fragments of our dismembered womanhood and reconstitute ourselves" (Moraga, *The Last Generation* 74). Huitzilopochtli enacts violence against her body, causing her to drop blood "down the belly of the serpent-mountain," but she survives in spite of the violence and shines for all to see (Moraga, *The Last Generation*

74).

In addition to re-membering goddesses, Moraga, utilizing "the metaphor of dismemberment…to reflect the difficulty of fitting her [the female's] body into the normative shapes of identity" (Bost 90), also dismembers the female body herself, allowing the female to speak and giving her an identity that transcends the physical limits of the body, the traditional site of fetishistic objectification. In the play *Heroes and Saints* (1992), Moraga completely detaches woman from her body not by beheading her, as Huitzilopochtli does his sister, but by de-bodying her. The play "centers on a female character born without a body, disabled by the pesticides that seep into the water supply of her rural Chicano community" (Bost 90). Cerezita emerges as a victim of poisoning pesticides that leave her with a bodiless head, an extreme production of dismemberment. In spite of creating her without a body, without limbs, Moraga wants the audience to see her as beautiful. In the notes regarding Cerezita's appearance, Moraga says, "Cerezita is a head of human dimension, but one who possesses such dignity of bearing and classical Indian beauty she can, at times, assume nearly religious proportions" (Moraga, *Heroes and Saints* 90). In the play, a man-made chemical deprives Cerezita of ever having limbs, leaving her with a head and no possibility of a body attached to it. Although Cerezita proclaims to her family, "It's not gonna hurt you. I'm normal from the neck up," the absence of a body sparks fear into those who see her, even her father, who does not want to touch her hair since it belongs to a living, talking, breathing apparition of absence (Moraga, *Heroes and Saints* 107). Confined to the top of a cart that she controls by using her chin, Cerezita relies on this one part of her head for movement. In her notes on the character of the bodiless

Cerezita, Moraga highlights the limits of the table, for it "can be disengaged at any time by flipping the hold on each wheel and pushing the chin piece out of her reach. At such times, Cerezita has no control and can only be moved by someone manually" (Moraga, *Heroes and Saints* 90). In the most simple and frightening of terms, neither Medusa, Coyolxauhqui, nor Cerezita can move on her own accord. The head, deprived of limbs, appears completely disempowered. These women who bear dismemberment in their bodies become apparitions of horror to those who look upon them as markers of some type of absence, some reminder of what is not there. However, Moraga transforms these disempowered figures bearing wounds into empowered beings who transcend the dismemberment of their bodies. For Moraga, dismemberment of a female body does not end in a story of horror; instead, dismemberment transforms her goddesses into figures of power, not figures of fright. After all, Medusa's head retains tremendous powers to turn onlookers into stone; Coyolxauhqui transforms into the moon; and Cerezita saves her hometown and ultimately becomes the head belonging to a hero.

Like Moraga, Joy Harjo comments on the power to survive beyond dismemberment, to live past death. She focuses on survival of the body through voice, which, like the moon of Coyolxauqui, can still shine after death. "All landscapes have a history, much the same as people exist within cultures, even tribes. There are distinct voices, languages that belong to particular areas. There are voices inside rocks, shallow ashes, shifting skies; they are not silent"—in this preface to her 1989 work *Secrets from the Center of the World*, a book of poems accompanied by Stephen Strom's photographs, Harjo considers the voice within every living thing, arguing that nothing is silent. For Harjo, even people who are no longer physically present can still speak with

a voice that lives within them and within the world. “Eagle Poem,” the last poem in *In Mad Love and War*, Harjo’s 1990 collection of poems, brings this intimate relationship between nature and voice to a culmination, showing the interconnectedness between the voice within oneself and the world outside oneself forming an inseparable, eternal bond. The speaker urges, “To pray you open your whole self / To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon / To one whole voice that is you” (Harjo 1-3). The voice is not a single being but an encapsulation of all things. Continuing, the speaker in the poem says,

> And there is more
> That you can’t see, can’t hear,
> Can’t know except in moments
> Steadily growing, and in languages
> That aren’t always sound but other
> Circles of motion (Harjo 4-9).

Voice is more than the sound coming from our mouths: it encompasses the entire world and can speak to us through “moments” and “motion.” Voices do not have to take a physical form to speak; these voices do not even have to be audible. Harjo’s speakers experience these voices through “moments,” feelings, memories, and listening. As part of *In Mad Love and War*, Harjo includes a poem called “For Anna Mae Pictou Aquash, Whose Spirit Is Present Here and in the Dappled Stars,” a poem dedicated to Anna Mae Aquash, a murdered Indigenous American activist. In the poem, Harjo connects Anna Mae’s voice to the world around her even though the voice is no longer present in the physical world. Addressing Anna Mae, the speaker cries,

> You are the shimmering young woman

who found her voice,

when you were warned to be silent, or have your body cut away

from you like an elegant weed.

You are the one whose spirit is present in the dappled stars. (Harjo 15-19)

Although she was killed, her voice lives among stars, like the voices living in the "rocks, shallow ashes, shifting skies" that tell their "secrets from the center of the world." Although dead, Anna Mae's voice does not stop speaking; rather, Anna Mae "found" her own voice and joins the voices in the stars. Like the "many voices" Harjo discusses in *She Had Some Horses* (1983), her seminal book of poems, these stars will "prance and lope like colored horses who stay with us" (Harjo 20). Anna Mae's voice will live on, speaking through the stars.

Conditions of Dismemberment

While Cavarero, Anzaldúa, and Moraga convincingly ground their works in mythological accounts of dismembered and dismembering female deities, it is important to note that dismemberment, fragmentation of the body, is not confined to televised entertainment, psychoanalytical fears, or even religious narratives. Throughout history, we can see examples of villainizing the female body through depicting women as gruesome victims of dismemberment or even the instigators of dismemberment themselves. A myth of the African American woman as dismemberer originated in real life in the United States as a result of a certain report suggesting that African American women had metaphorically crippled African American men through a symbolic form of castration. "A fundamental fact of Negro American family life is the often reversed

roles of husband and wife"—this "fact" originates from *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, a report prepared by Daniel Patrick Moynihan for the Department of Labor regarding the economic conditions of black families in the United States in 1965. While the report purposed to depict "the effect that three centuries of exploitation have had on the fabric of Negro society itself" (Moynihan), it nevertheless put forth headlining assertions about black family life, such as its well-known comment: "Almost one-fourth of negro families are headed by females" (Moynihan). Not only did the report provide this statistic, but it also presented female-headed households as a growing trend in black communities. Creating a "picture of disintegrating Negro marriages," the report claimed much statistical evidence against the integrity of black families and against the black woman:

> Divorces have increased of late for both whites and nonwhites, but at a much greater rate for the latter. In 1940 both groups had a divorce rate of 2.2 percent. By 1964 the white rate had risen to 3.6 percent, but the nonwhite rate had reached 5.1 percent—40 percent greater than the formerly equal white rate. (Moynihan)

Using the divorce rates to draw a connection between the breakdown of the black family and the emergence of female-headed households, Moynihan promulgated a view of black women as primary breadwinners and suggested that this issue related primarily to black female structures, generally underplaying its effects on white families. Moreover, black females became the individuals seemingly responsible for the financial struggles of their families. They emerged from the report as threatening, dismembering harbingers of castration, damaging the economic advancement of the

black man. According to the report:

> As a direct result of this high rate of divorce, separation, and desertion, a very large percent of Negro families are headed by females. While the percentage of such families among whites has been dropping since 1940, it has been rising among Negroes. The percent of nonwhite families headed by a female is more than double the percent for whites. Fatherless nonwhite families increased by a sixth between 1950 and 1960, but held constant for white families. (Moynihan)

Although the report demonstrated percentages and numbers showcasing problems within black families while downplaying issues within the composition of white families, it also put forth a quite contested argument surrounding the matriarchy of black women in the United States. Moynihan suggested that "the Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is too out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well" (Moynihan). Moynihan had accomplished a devastating task of dismembering the image of the black woman, calling her role in the family "out of line with the rest of the American society" and asserting that her matriarchal place "seriously retards" and "imposes a crushing burden." His views helped to promulgate a faceless, nameless image of the black woman who impedes the manhood of the black man. In the same way that patriarchal representations of Coatlicue or Medea cast motherhood as a monstrous side effect of the female body, matriarchy assumed a role of abnormality in the report, some kind of "tangle of pathology" from which the black

family needs to escape (Moynihan). From Moynihan's perspective, relationships between black men and black women represented a deviation, an exception to the rule. Asserting that matriarchy was characteristic of black relationships, he claimed, "A fundamental fact of Negro American family life is the often reversed roles of husband and wife" (Moynihan). Reversal, retardation, pathology—his language created an image of the black woman as a living, breathing monster seeking to castrate her man through depriving him of financial and social stability and ultimately threatening his manhood and place in a changing society.

Reaffirming traditional gender lines, Moynihan's report not only argued that something is inherently pathologized about a reversal of concretized "roles," but also suggested that the black female is affecting the economic and educational opportunities available to the black male. Moynihan's data suggested that black females "are better educated than Negro males" and that black females acquired more professional positions in the workforce within white-collar environments than black males (Moynihan). Moynihan created an impression of the black woman as a threat to the progress being made by the black man; he asserted, "Among nonprofessional Labor Department employees—where the most employment opportunities exist for all groups—Negro women outnumber Negro men 4 to 1, and average almost one grade higher in classification" (Moynihan). Moreover, the report used this information to make claims about the effects of black men working in opposition to black women, asserting,

> Both as a husband and as a father the Negro male is made to feel inadequate, not because he is unlovable or unaffectionate, lacks

> intelligence or even a gray flannel suit. But in a society that measures a man by the size of his pay check, he doesn't stand very tall in a comparison with his white counterpart. (Moynihan)

In an interview with Cecil Brown, Toni Morrison made a reference to the impact this report, portraying competition between black men and black women in both economic advancement and educational mobility, had on black relationships. She says, "I think it's a mistake—maybe not a mistake—but I just find it interesting that—uh—the play that Moynihan gave of the sinister black woman, which is a white man's idea, is being so beautifully absorbed and digested and surrendered to by a number of black men who are talking about it" (Morrison, "Interview" 457). The "sinister black woman" is taking away all of the opportunities available to black men; the "sinister black woman" is emasculating the man. She is making some progress in society, both financially and educationally, surpassing the black man and his efforts to succeed. In her essay "Dear Black Man," featured in Toni Cade Bambara's 1970 collection *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, published only five years after Moynihan's report, Fran Sanders directly addresses this presentation of the matriarchal woman as progressing at the man's inability to do so. She says,

> In the not too distant past, there has been, on the part of most writers, be they historians, novelists, present-day documentarians, or statisticians, the tendency to vilify the Black woman as castrating matriarch. Whether she went about this task with a velvet glove or a steel gauntlet, she produced the same effect—she de-balled the Black man. (Sanders 115)

Sanders specifically uses the language of castration to describe this image of the

black woman and the supposed effect she has had on black men. In another article from Bambara's *The Black Woman* anthology, "Is the Black Male Castrated?" Jean Carey Bond and Patricia Peery also comment on the idea of the "castrating matriarch" and argue against its validity, pointing out its rise as a patriarchal myth of white society. They refer to this view of women as a "popular and dangerous fiction: the myth of Black male emasculation and its descendant concept, the myth of the Black female matriarchy" (Bond and Peery 170). Pointing to Moynihan's report as the root of this growing ideology, as the source of this competitive conflict, Bond and Peery isolate it as the problematic text causing the stress, saying,

> These companion myths are not recent in their origin; however, they have most recently been popularized through the highly publicized and highly touted work *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, by Daniel Patrick Moynihan—so successfully popularized that even Blacks have swallowed his assumptions and conclusions hook, line, and sinker. (Bond and Peery 170)

In addition to crediting the Moynihan report with initiating and perpetuating these myths of dismembering castration in the first place, they also attempt to reveal the document as a source of scientific racism being used to project attitudes and opinions onto the black family structure. Bond and Peery utilize Moynihan's report as an example of the pervasive influence of "racist social scientific thought, which has utterly failed to produce in-depth studies of the Afro-American social structure" (Bond and Peery 170). They point out that Moynihan's report produces a theory of black matriarchy based on a statistic suggesting that women serve as the heads of one fourth

of black households (Bond and Peery 170). They question the validity of basing an entire theory on one statistic and demonstrate that the myths surrounding black women are harmful not only because they affect the relationships between black women and men, but also because they continue to project white perspectives onto black women.

Sanders and Carey and Peery are only a few examples of the women writing about this threatening image of the black female. For instance, in a thought-provoking article called "Black Romanticism," Joyce Green demonstrates the complex social position into which the concept of "castrating matriarchy" forces black women. Although women are trying not to bring to fruition the myths, the "dangerous fiction[s]," that they face, these myths are nevertheless creating tensions between women, who are attempting to refute the myth, and men, who believe women are undermining their efforts to succeed socially because of that very myth constructed by white perception. She says,

> The Black woman is being forced into a position of not daring to voice her criticism in the struggle when she sees certain discrepancies, for she wants so not to emasculate the Black man. She wants not to further the Black/White myth of her as the overpowerful partner. (Green 199)

After all, within Moynihan's argument, the woman, because of her ability to exert more influence within the economic sphere, her ability to earn the paycheck, is producing a "mother-centered pattern" of female dominance within the black community while, at the same time, she is responsible for the "status of the Negro man and his position in the community and his need for feeling himself an important person, free and able to make his contribution in the whole society in order that he may strengthen his home"

(Moynihan).

Like Green, Gwen Patton uses her article, "Black People and the Victorian Ethos," to emphasize that Moynihan's report is merely an extension of a "Victorian Philosophy of womanhood" (Patton 205). It is this philosophy which has defined the gender roles to which Moynihan so tenaciously subscribes. She does not accept his premise that black relationships exhibit a reversal of normative roles; rather, she questions the basis on which this premise rests: traditional values associated with Victorian depictions of women. She says that it is not just the white man, Moynihan, who is perpetuating this kind of information; instead, black men are also coming to view black women under these auspices. She laments this problem, "Unfortunately, we have some Black men who have a stake in the Victorian Philosophy. Black women, according to the Victorian Philosophy, have de-balled and 'castrated' their men. Previously, Black women were a necessary and functional part of the struggle and according to skills were given various tasks to perform" (Patton 208). One of the important components of this statement is the distinction made between perceptions of women before the report and after the report. She argues that, "previously," black women constituted an important force in the "struggle" against issues of race; however, the report depicts women as participants in excluding the black man from society and promulgating a social "rejection of him" (Moynihan). In the case of the mythical female castrator, dismemberment is not a physical act. Unlike Medea, the "castrating" black woman does not literally chop off anyone's penis or slice anyone into parts. Nevertheless, her body serves as a site of fear. Her economical position incites a type of figurative dismemberment that very realistically manifests itself in the social

relationships between males and females who, because of a report, unnecessarily view each other in competitive terms.

The belief that the female dismembers the male is dismembering in and of itself to the integrity and well-being of the female body. As in the psychoanalytical framework outlined by thinkers such as Freud and Lacan, the female in the narrative of matriarchal dominance promulgated by the Moynihan report appears to be a threat to the male. She threatens the phallic primacy of manhood; she threatens the economical primacy of manhood. As a representation of absence, she herself disappears, and, in an even worse consequence, she can become a target of violence. In her essay "The Shadow of the Whip: A Comment on Male-Female Relations in the Caribbean" (1972), Merle Hodge discusses violence against women. She argues that this violence arises from the "shadow of the whip" hovering about black men who are descendants of a slave culture in which a white man exercised physical authority over the black man. Hodge argues that, in an attempt to re-assert their manhood, black men in the Caribbean have tried to establish themselves as authority figures by placing black women into their formerly occupied position of being the slave or inferior. She argues that this violence is ultimately the result of power, or more specifically the lack thereof. She says,

> The black man in the role of dispenser of violence is very likely a descendant of the white slave-overseer asserting an almost bottomless authority over the whipped. But there is one fundamental difference, for whereas the overseer beat and tortured his victim because he had power over him, the black man ill-treating his woman is expressing his desire for power, is betraying a dire insecurity vis-à-vis the female. (Hodge

191)

This male struggle for power is a concept that both James Boggs and Kwame Ture (formerly Stokely Carmichael) discuss in their essays in *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing* (1968). Although these authors address issues of power and discrimination as they relate to black men, they do not acknowledge the role that women must play in a fight for liberation. According to Boggs and Ture, it is the "desire for power" that fueled the entire Black Power movement, a movement that frightened whites for its emphasis not on issues of equality and civil rights, but on the power of the black individual. Boggs argues that black power was a threatening concept to whites, for "Black Power does not mean black people becoming a part of, or integrating themselves into, white power" (Boggs 106). Rather, a movement towards actual Black Power would result in changing the current power structure. Similarly, Ture notes that Black Power would indicate a shift in perceptions of black individuals, who "are defined by two forces, their blackness and their powerlessness" (Ture 122-3). Assimilating black individuals into a white society that ignores black history and continues to promote "institutionalized racism" does not address the foundational issue of who holds the power (Ture 123). However, in addressing issues of power, Boggs and Carmichael focus on the power of the black man and *his* manhood, ignoring necessary paths of agency and power for the black woman and *her* womanhood. For example, Boggs addresses legal definitions of black manhood, asserting, "The 'all men' defined in the Constitution as 'created equal' did not include black men. By definition, blacks were not men but some kind of colored beings. It took 335 years, from 1619 to 1954, before an effort was made to extend the definition of manhood to blacks" (Boggs 109).

To consider the position of the black woman, we return to Hodge's argument, noting that the black woman, instead of being included in arguments regarding the equality of "all men," becomes the conduit for the black male's expression of the "desire for power," which white individuals and institutions have historically denied him and also denied her. Occupying the inferior position in a power struggle, the black woman becomes a reminder of the black man's hated self, a reminder of his "dire insecurity" (Hodge 191). For example, we see this insecurity present in Julia Fields's story "Not Your Singing, Dancing Spade" in the *Black Fire* anthology. In her story, a black entertainer is married to a white woman but employs a black woman as a maid in his home. The black maid reminds him of his own image and becomes a reminder of his blackness portrayed in the magazine article about him. Although his family embraces the maid, he "hated her" (Fields 480). Unlike his white wife, the maid "was almost as black as himself, and her hair was short" (Fields 480). Not only does he seem to resent her for her blackness, but also for the way in which she reminds him of black music, for he "felt like singing an old down-home blues whenever he saw her" (Fields 480). This black man has no concept of this woman as a living woman; rather, with his eyes, he cuts her into pieces, pieces that remind him of the color of his skin. While he struggles to find his own sense of self, he also denies her a sense of identity as a person. Instead, he sees her as a demeaning, hateful reminder of himself. Fields brings to light issues surrounding the position of the black woman in relationship to male-centered movements for power that ignore and perceptually dismember the black woman for her role in the supposed castration plot of matriarchy, economic advancement, and powerlessness of the black male. What agency does the black woman have? How can

she seek power?

Dismembered in social narratives suggesting that her primary role is to signify male identity, the woman continues to inhabit a place of absence. From a discussion of absence, the question might then arise: why would female authors of modern theoretical and fictional texts choose to highlight the vulnerable state of the body, specifically the female body? Why might these authors purposefully dismember the bodies of female figures? How is it productive for modern authors to highlight the already dismembered state of women? A severed throat, snapped neck, raped vagina, scarred body—images of dismembered women color the pages of many provocative works by female authors writing in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Although a disturbingly graphic concept to envision, dismemberment does expose the body at its limits, making seen what normally remains unseen. Viewing these parts individually can create an understanding of the body, an intention perhaps guiding the mission statement of almost any anatomy laboratory. Whereas television for the purpose of entertainment might focus entirely on the dismemberment itself, these authors use the very sight of dismemberment we find so horrific to engage in a process of understanding the body that was once present. Through destruction comes the possibility of reconstruction. As Mbembe notes, there is something powerfully transformative about acknowledging the final dismemberment that is death. He argues that one becomes a subject through facing the realization of death, the realization of the ultimate truth that death will dismember life. In this sense, death and dismemberment are foundational to the development of the subject. He says,

> It is through this confrontation with death that he or she is cast into the

> incessant movement of history. Becoming subject therefore supposes upholding the work of death. To uphold the work of death is precisely how Hegel defines the life of the Spirit. The life of the Spirit, he says, is not that life which is frightened of death, and spares itself destruction, but that life which assumes death and lives with it. Spirit attains its truth only by finding itself in absolute dismemberment. (Mbembe 14)

To face death is to embrace the work of the Spirit; through dismembering oneself, one can find the truth of life beyond the limits of the physical body. Associating the "death that lives a human life" with "the definition of absolute knowledge and sovereignty: risking the entirety of one's life," Mbembe posits the ultimate dismemberment of death as a pathway to sovereignty, and some profound authors of modern texts use this idea of dismemberment as the ultimate power over life to reflect the empowering though physically damaging effects of committing an act of such dismemberment. Moreover, it is important to note Cavarero's statement that dismemberment affects not just "the end of a human life but the human condition itself." Whereas we might be able to agree on a definition of dismemberment as a severing of body parts, the idea of what constitutes the human condition could be more challenging. We cannot assume that the human condition is a universal experience, for that condition can take on many different forms. In her book *The Human Condition* (1958), Hannah Arendt enumerates the complexities of defining what the human condition is exactly. She acknowledges that there is a sense of "the most general condition of human existence: birth and death, natality and mortality" (Arendt 8). Julia Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (*Pouvoirs de L'horreur*, 1980),

suggests that revulsion experienced at the site of direct offense to the body, the state of the abject, operates along this line demarcating death from life. The abject arouses a frightening awareness of what it takes for us to be living. It is a personal awareness. Kristeva calls it a recognition of "*my* [italics mine] condition as a living being" (Kristeva 2). However, Arendt would remind us to consider the many complexities associated with a deceptively simple phrase like "condition as a living being." At the same time that we examine the line between life and death, we must then question what we mean by even having a life. Within the category of "living" itself, Arendt identifies "three fundamental human activities: labor, work, and action," each of which contributes to the life one experiences (Arendt 7). She argues,

> All three activities and their corresponding conditions are intimately connected with the most general condition of human existence…Labor assures not only individual survival, but the life of the species. Works and its products, the human artifact, bestow a measure of permanence and durability upon the futility of mortal life and the fleeting character of human time. Action, in so far as it engages in founding and preserving political bodies, creates the condition for remembrance, that is, for history. (Arendt 8-9)

Not only are "labor, work, and action" conditions that comprise existence as a "living being," but they in turn produce the "corresponding conditions" that create environments capable of "survival," "permanence," "remembrance." Moreover, these conditions are constantly in motion because people alter the conditions of life. We cannot assume that labor, work, and action are static, fixed conditions in and of

themselves. Rather, humans also create conditions for themselves and for others. Thus, the human condition is not only a personal matter, as Kristeva might suggest, but also a social matter. Arendt writes,

> In addition to the conditions under which life is given to man on earth, and partly out of them, men constantly create their own, self-made conditions, which, their human origin and their variability notwithstanding, possess the same conditioning power as natural things. Whatever touches or enters into a sustained relationship with human life immediately assumes the character of a condition of human existence. This is why men, no matter what they do, are always conditioned beings. Whatever enters the human world of its own accord or is drawn into it by human effort becomes part of the human condition. (Arendt 9)

While conditions of the living can produce the aforementioned "survival," "permanence," and "remembrance," these conditions, as they continue to evolve through the influence of people, can also result in the horrifying conditions of existence that constitute history, such as racism, slavery, abuse, sexism, and so many more.

Literature often allows us to understand the varying nature of conditions and to experience the conditions of another, showing us that the conditions of life are rarely the same for any one person. Toni Morrison's 1987 *Beloved*, along with Octavia Butler's 1979 *Kindred,* paint realistic scenes of the unimaginable conditions of slavery experienced by black females in the nineteenth-century American South. Joanna Russ's 1975 *The Female Man* imagines a world in which the fictional conditions between men and women vary from planet to planet, mirroring American social conditions around the

late 1960s and 1970s, as well as creating frightening futures. Marie Elena-John's 2006 novel *Unburnable* demonstrates the conditions of deeply rooted racism and its effects on people's lives, particularly revealing attitudes of white superiority embedded in the mind of a white woman from Texas whose judgment of a Caribbean mother leads to fatal consequences. Finally, Denise Chávez's 1990 *Face of an Angel* and Leslie Marmon Silko's 1991 *Almanac of the Dead* reveal the incredible conditions of abuse and violence Indigenous American women have endured. While many texts address issues regarding the incredibly violent treatment of women, these six novels paint a particularly stirring picture of dismemberment as it is experienced in various forms by women. Examined together, these novels depict various experiences of women across an American landscape. African American women, Indigenous American women, Caribbean women, and Caucasian women fill the pages of these novels written by profound authors exposing the human conditions occupied by their female characters. In addition to highlighting women in various conditions, these particular novels also weave forms of dismemberment into their discussions of women. In these novels, dismemberment is a physical reality as female bodies lay dead and dismembered for us to behold. Dismemberment is also a figurative experience, for many of these characters experience dismemberment on a metaphorical level, leaving their bodies visibly unharmed but inwardly scarred, beaten, and broken.

When considering Cavarero's statement that dismemberment threatens not just "the end of a human life but the human condition itself" (Cavarero 8), it then becomes necessary to understand that the phrase "human condition" encompasses more than just the boundary between life and death. While dismemberment haunts the pages of these

literary texts, it affects the characters differently, impacting each character's condition of life. These texts that focus on female experiences of dismemberment engage in an important conversation relevant to today's society. Dismemberment in any form, whether it be physical, mental, social, or even emotional dismemberment, affects whatever condition one may occupy in life. Dismemberment can indeed exert a destructive force upon the human condition; however, as these texts demonstrate, the destruction of a particular condition may not always be negative. Many modern literary characters experience the deadening effects of dismemberment, but some use dismemberment as a way of attacking their own conditions and asserting a voice within these conditions. The discussion of these texts highlights both the disempowering and empowering effects of dismemberment on female characters who attempt to resist the oppressive conditions in which they find themselves. Each chapter in this discussion aims to explain the varying human conditions of important characters while also examining how acts of dismemberment impact the conditions significantly. Using cultural references from American social contexts, the chapters first introduce ways of thinking about various forms of dismemberment and then connect them to the ideas of dismemberment, as well as its effects on conditions, presented within fictional contexts, in order to expose the parts, the members, and the bodies.

In the chapter following the introduction to this text, a discussion of physical dismemberment comes to the forefront for analysis. Dismemberment often manifests itself visibly as a direct assault to the living body. Moreover, this dismemberment of the living body can result in death. Framed around the context of slavery in the United States, both *Beloved* and *Kindred* depict scenes of death by mutilation of the neck.

Sethe in *Beloved* utilizes a hand saw to begin severing her daughter's neck, leaving a bloody, permanent wound at the site of what used to be a sign of breathing, pulsing life. She refuses to allow her daughter to grow up in slavery. In a shed, she makes a painful decision, a decision that will haunt her for the rest of her life. She dismembers her daughter in an effort to save her from a lifetime of death. Likewise, *Kindred*'s Alice places a rope around her neck and hangs herself in the home of her slave-owner. Her head drops down as her legs swing from side to side. Her neck remains in the rope, and her corpse beckons to the living who find her dead in the home. Deprived of her husband, children, and freedom, Alice hangs onto the hope of escape from the rafters of a ceiling that will no longer contain her. These women resist their conditions of slavery in the only way that they can. Beaten, abused, violated, and enslaved, Sethe and Alice refuse to remain in the horrifying circumstances of their existence, and they speak out through inscribing messages onto the physical body, messages that they will no longer bow to the whims of the slave-owners. They transcend the limits of the body in the determination to find peace in death, to find Mbembe's "absolute knowledge" in the dismemberment of the body. These messages are bloody, messy, and horrifying; nevertheless, their messengers are powerful women who signify resistance through assuming control over their bodies and using any means necessary, even dismemberment of the body, to fight systems of slavery and oppression.

In the next chapter, dismemberment and violence emerge as male and female characters fight for power and domination. However, it is not just the female body that bears the marks of dismemberment. Attempts to dismember the female body can result in physical dismemberment of the male body. Russ's *The Female Man* is a blood-

soaked narrative that positions females as not just victims of dismemberment, but also instigators of their own dismemberment. Relentlessly resisting male persecutors, strong female characters in Russ's novel literally fight back against male oppressors. Using multiple fictional worlds as settings for the novel, Russ utilizes extreme conditions to expose social constructs of gender and sexuality that dismember not only the identity of the individual, but also the physical body as males and females battle against these constructs. The provocative novel showcases powerful women who use their bodies as weapons against masculine attacks while the text simultaneously positions the state of dismemberment as a weapon in and of itself in the development of the plot for its female protagonists. In spite of physical and psychological dismemberment rendering these female characters practically invisible in a male world and threatening to snuff out their existence, these females use the very invisibility and fragmentation of their bodies as an advantage over those who oppress them. Invisibility, fragmentation, dismemberment—these experiences present opportunities to transcend the limitations of the body, not succumb to them. Each of Russ's main characters contributes to the unfolding narrative of female power; however, it is Jael who truly captures our attention as readers and commands us to see the invisibility of her dismembered body as a source of power. Jael kills, dismembers, and destroys; and she does it with the determination to overcome oppression. She is a force with which to be reckoned, and she serves as an example of a dismembered dismemberer who is not afraid to use her body and the bodies of others as monuments of resistance.

Then, the succeeding chapter presents perception and racism as forms of dismemberment. Marie Elena-John's novel *Unburnable* is a telling depiction of the

bodily consequences of dismembering one's identity on the basis of race. In the novel, an American woman from Texas severely dismembers a Caribbean woman, using judgments, assumptions, and misguided perceptions to eviscerate the woman's character. Her opinion ultimately leads to the death of the black woman, who is hanged for a crime with a complicated history that the white woman would never understand. Although perception may not be as visibly horrifying as disembowelment or cutting one's throat with a hand saw, it nevertheless produces horrifying consequences that do manifest themselves in a physical reality. The white woman's estimation of the black woman's character ultimately becomes a deciding factor in a case of capital punishment. Moreover, in the novel, perception plays a key role in the brutal dismemberment and mutilation of a young woman's vagina by a mother-in-law who perceives the young girl, Iris, to be promiscuous in sexual actions and social behavior. Using a Coke bottle as a weapon, this mother-in-law bloodies and rips apart the young girl's genitals. Seeking justice for her daughter, Iris's mother turns out to be Matilda, the black woman condemned by the American woman. In a complicated plot that weaves into its pages the dangers of perception, Marie Elena-John demonstrates that perception grounded in racist beliefs dismembers the body. Hateful perception can threaten one's identity and obliterate the victim's integrity as a human being. Neither Iris nor her mother can recover from the wounds of dismemberment. Iris screams out in pain with a scar that will never completely heal, and her mother's neck hangs in a noose designed to punish her for actions that no one would ever completely understand. However, the family members of Iris and Matilda hear their cries and learn the truth about this daughter and mother. Even the American woman remembers the silenced

bodies and hears them speak the truth she would too late learn to understand.

Finally, in the last chapter, dismemberment is a physical and emotional experience. Written by Indigenous American authors, Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* and Chávez's *Face of an Angel* bring attention to the terrible, indescribable violence experienced by indigenous women of color. Rape, molestation, incest, religious taboos, murder—the women in the pages of these novels experience incredible, insufferable violence. However, what is remarkable about the characters created by Silko and Chávez is that the women so battered and abused by male characters who dismember their bodies and minds are ultimately able to re-member themselves through reclaiming their sense of self and identity. These women demonstrate tremendous power by reassembling themselves and finding strength in their ancestry, relationships with other women, and commitment to survival. As these women reclaim their Indigenous American heritage, they begin to reclaim themselves. The female characters created by Silko and Chávez endure horrifying forms of dismemberment that have physical and psychological effects on their bodies; however, they survive their conditions and demonstrate resilience in the face of violence. Their struggle for survival is also a cultural struggle for survival, and their power to survive the dismemberment of their bodies exudes the strength of their beliefs, heritage, and perseverance. Although marked by violence, they speak through re-membering the past and reconstructing a hope for the future. These women collect the fragments, memories, and pieces of wisdom from the women who have laid the foundation of resistance for them. They consult their mothers and grandmothers. They preserve all of the pages of their lives that they can. They remember the violence they and their ancestors have endured. They know the

brokenness of a body exposed to multiple forms of violence. They weave together their experiences from the remains of what they have lost, and they listen intently to the silence of the limbs.

Chapter 2: Silencing and Speaking

> White people would like to think the only history Black people have is of being colonized by them or enslaved by them but most definitely, in whatever language, being controlled by them. There really have been long periods of time when Black people didn't even know that white people existed. And I really think it's such a shame, that the minute we could conceptualize a thing as a white person, ancestorally speaking, honkies showed themselves to be such beasts. [10]

A woman's body appears on the screen. She is regal. Dressed in a white gown, her beauty fills the frame. With coiffed hair, perfect makeup, and a dazzling smile, she stands at the microphone, ready to give her acceptance speech. The winner of an Emmy award for best actress in a drama, Viola Davis received an acknowledgement never before given to a black woman nominated in that category. Speaking to the crowd, Davis quoted a line from Harriet Tubman, saying, "In my dreams, I see a line…Over that line, I see green fields and lovely flowers and beautiful white women with their arms stretched out to me over that line, but I can't seem to get there no how, I can't seem to get over that line."[11] Most praised her speech; some criticized it. Nevertheless, in that moment, she proclaimed to listeners all over the world: "We talk about women constantly in 2015…It's that barrier we're trying to reach and cross. We dream of it. It seeps into your body: See me for who I am. Accept me for who I am. You see the finish

[10] Giovanni, Nikki. "I Fell Off the Roof One Day (A View of the Black University)." *The Black Woman: An Anthology*. Ed. Toni Cade Bambara. New York: Washington Square Press, 1970. 192-198. Google Play Books.

[11] Birnbaum, Debra. "Viola Davis on Her Groundbreaking Emmy Win: 'I Felt Like I Fulfilled a Purpose.'" *Variety*. Variety Media, LLC., 23 September 2015. Web. 12 December 2015.

line. And you just always seem to fall short." In the present day, Davis uses her voice to speak about the lack of diversity in Hollywood. She addresses inequality and the lack of opportunity, and many people remember her words through her now well-known speech. In profound neo-slave narratives, authors like Toni Morrison and Octavia Butler also speak through female characters. These characters are no Hollywood actresses standing at a microphone, but they do speak about oppression and discrimination. However, they do not use voices or speeches to do so: they use bodies.

In Toni Morrison's 1987 novel *Beloved*, Sethe is a complex female character who speaks about the inequality of her situation, not through voice, but through action, quite controversial action. Morrison's masterpiece *Beloved* has garnered much literary criticism since its publication. For many critics, this neo-slave narrative that transports the reader to the period of pre-Civil War slavery during the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 also provides a contemporary commentary on issues of race in the American context. In the chapter "Not Only the Footprints but the Water Too" in her book *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Avery F. Gordon calls the novel "one of the most significant contributions to the understanding of haunting" (Gordon 139). This idea of haunting is significant to the place that Morrison's novel *Beloved* occupies in current history because the haunting of the ghost Beloved is a haunting of the "Sixty Million and more" to whom Morrison dedicates the book, for Beloved represents not just a remembrance of "Sethe's dead child but also of an unnamed African girl lost at sea, not yet become an African-American" (Gordon 139). Deborah Horvitz, analyzing the novel in her essay "Nameless Ghosts: Possession and Dispossession in *Beloved*," suggests that Morrison's work signifies a reunification of matrilineal connections lost

between “mothers and daughters,” those women “dragged onto slave ships in Africa and also all Black women in America trying to trace their ancestry back to the mother on the ship attached to them” (Horvitz 93). Moreover, in “Temporal Defamiliarization in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*,” Brian Finney posits that the novel employs the oral tradition in communicating “the experience of slavery” central to the development of the story (Finney 104). Describing her own language choices in the novel, Morrison herself articulates her intention to convey a feeling of being taken from one’s familiar surroundings and then transplanted into an unfamiliar world, from home in Africa to slavery in the United States. She says,

> The reader is snatched, yanked, thrown into an environment completely foreign, and I want it as the first stroke of the shared experience that might be possible between the reader and the novel’s population. Snatched just as the slaves were from one place to another, from any place to another, without preparation and without defense. No lobby, no door, no entrance. (Morrison, “The Opening Sentences of *Beloved*” 91-2)

Through haunting, reunification, and experience, the novel attempts to remember those severed connections between relatives, those dismembered slaves moved from coast to coast with no voice, no agency. The reality of slavery is horrifying. It is complete dismemberment of the slave’s life, freedom, and body. As Achille Mbembe states in “Necropolitics” (2003),

> Any historical account of the rise of modern terror needs to address slavery…in the context of the plantation, the humanity of the slave appears as the perfect figure of a shadow. Indeed, the slave condition

> results from a triple loss: loss of a 'home,' loss of rights over his or her body, and loss of political status. This triple loss is identical with absolute domination, natal alienation, and social death (expulsion from humanity altogether). (Mbembe 21)

Mbembe identifies the ways in which slavery strips the slave of any control over "home," "body," or "political status." The slave occupies an existence of loss, of absence. Slavery dismembers the slave of any social standing as person, citizen, or human. It deprives the slave of being a member of anything.

The novel certainly speaks to issues of slavery and calls forth a disturbing remembrance of horrors experienced through situating readers within this time period. Addressing the slave's deprivation of freedom, the novel also makes an interesting comment on Western prioritization of systems of knowledge as a form of oppression, as a form of mental dismemberment of the slave's identity and prevention of the slave's membership in a society of enslavement. The white schoolteacher, quite arguably the novel's most villainous character, engages in scientific racism in its purest form, using his own education as a tool to assign a subhuman level of existence to the slaves on his plantation. Although the schoolteacher interprets his observations of the slaves as purely academic endeavors, two slaves refuse to submit to his authority: Sixo and Sethe. In completely different ways, they challenge the hierarchy of Western thought, and they pay for their resistance with bodies and blood. Sixo sacrifices his life for the cause of resistance, and his actions paint a telling picture of the horrific realities of slavery as fire consumes his body, burning his flesh, moving rapidly from his toes to his head. In an essay called "The Disruption of Formulaic Discourse: Writing Resistance and Truth in

Beloved," Lovalerie King addresses one of the most thought-provoking relationships in the novel, that between Sixo and the schoolteacher. King argues, "Analysis of a key exchange between Sixo and schoolteacher, who personifies scientific discourse, reveals that Sixo is also associated with the production of knowledge, local knowledge that continues to be recalled and put into action long after his murder" (King 274). Although she suggests that Sixo "remains the novel's most dramatic personification of perpetual resistance" to the schoolteacher's discourse because he talks back to it and ultimately sacrifices his life for it (King 280), he is not the only character speaking back to the schoolteacher, the representation of Western discourse. Instead, it is Sethe, a female slave, who contributes to one of the most gripping scenes found in literature. Upon seeing the schoolteacher and recognizing his intentions to take her children back to the Sweet Home plantation, Sethe kills her daughter, cutting her throat and "holding a blood-soaked child to her chest" (Morrison, *Beloved* 149). This act of silencing, of severing a head from a body, a voice from a throat, becomes Sethe's resistance, her way of speaking. Though occupying a disempowered position, Sethe engages in a discourse of painful, dismembering resistance that challenges the schoolteacher's white assumptions of non-white behavior and that speaks back to her oppressor.

Silencing in Life

From a theoretical standpoint, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak addresses this idea of speaking back to Western systems of knowledge. In her well-known essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" from *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak, building on Foucault's explanation of the episteme, puts forth the idea of epistemic violence. In *The Order of Things*, Foucault uses the term *episteme* to describe the ordering structure that

governs the acceptance and formation of knowledge during a particular period of time. Within the framework of the episteme, knowledge "grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility" (Foucault, Preface xxii). Examining knowledge as it becomes manifested in the episteme, Foucault argues, will make known "those configurations within the *space* of knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science" (Foucault, Preface xxii). However, it is theorists like Spivak who demonstrate the limits of "space" and "diverse forms" of knowledge within Western discourses. Although Foucault divides the episteme of Western thought into two primary time periods, the "Classical age (roughly half-way through the seventeenth century) and the second, at the beginning of the nineteenth century…the beginning of the modern age" (Foucault, Preface xxii), Spivak considers those epistemes of knowledge that have been subsumed under the heading of Western knowledge through the "palimpsestic narrative of imperialism," a narrative that has excluded those forms of knowledge that stand outside of the generally accepted episteme (Spivak, *A Critique* 2115).

Before a discussion of the effects of imperialism on knowledge, it is first important to note by what mechanisms Spivak underscores a distinction between the Western episteme and the episteme of the Other excluded by it. Foucault argues that, within the episteme of Western knowledge, there is a division between the thought and the "unthought," between man and his Other (Foucault, *Order of Things* 326). Describing this relationship, Foucault argues:

> Man has not been able to describe himself as a configuration in the *episteme* without thought at the same time discovering, both in itself and

> outside itself, at its borders yet also in its very warp and woof, an element of darkness, an apparently inert density in which it is embedded, an unthought which it contains entirely, yet in which it is also caught. The unthought (whatever name we give it) is not lodged in man like a shrivelled-up nature or a stratified history; it is, in relation to man, the Other: the Other that is not only a brother but a twin, born, not of man, nor in man, but beside him and at the same time, in an identical newness, in an unavoidable duality. (Foucault, *Order of Things* 326)

For Foucault, man situates himself in the episteme only to find a reflected "double" (Foucault, *Order of Things* 327). The thought he contributes to knowledge carries within it the "unthought," the reflection of thought that remains hidden in "darkness." Foucault equates the "darkness" in which this "unthought" presents itself with the unconscious, where "dim mechanisms, faceless determinations, [and] a whole landscape of shadow" reside under the presentation of the "scientific thought man applies to himself" (Foucault, *Order of Things* 326). Within this division between the thought man and the "unthought" Other, the binary appears to remain cut along psychological lines, distinguishing the conscious from the unconscious.

However, unlike Foucault, Edward Said proposes a binary between the "self" and the "Other" that is entrenched in ethnic difference. Instead of seeing the "Other" as a manifestation of the man's unconscious, Said suggests that the "Other" is the living embodiment of the non-white individual. In the book *Orientalism*, Said argues that the emergence of a "sovereign Western consciousness" has been possible through "the idea of European identity as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples

and cultures" (Said 1871). In this construction, the "Other" is that against which Western thought has been "setting itself off," making itself separate from as a system of thought (Said 1868). It is through interpreting that which is "non-European," the Orient in the argument set forth by Said, that the consciousness of Western society develops "its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (Said 1866). For Spivak, the process to develop the episteme of "Western consciousness" at the expense of this "non-European" Other has been a violent one, for colonization has played a significant role in this Other-ing. Terming this process "epistemic violence," whereby one episteme comes to replace another episteme, she argues that "the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other" is one of the "clearest available example[s]" of violent imposition of the Western episteme onto that of the non-Western (Spivak, *A Critique* 2115).

Demonstrating the various ways in which the replacement of a given episteme occurs, Spivak refers to Foucault's discussion of madness in *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. She says, "It is well known that Foucault locates one case of epistemic violence, a complete overhaul of the episteme, in the redefinition of madness at the end of the European eighteenth century" (Spivak, *A Critique* 2115). Indeed, in *Madness and Civilization,* Foucault addresses the shift from a discussion of madness to an imprisonment of it. In place of the "incessant dialogue of reason and madness during the Renaissance," "[c]onfinement, prisons, dungeons, [and] even tortures" came to the forefront as a discourse of madness, as a way of managing and concealing the madness (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 262). A belief in imprisoning the madman overthrew the former "dialogue" of discussion, leaving in its

place a "dialogue of struggle" (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 262). Spivak refers to the concept of madness to demonstrate the violent measures associated with the removal and instigation of an episteme, for, as Foucault demonstrates in the case of madness, physical restriction replaced verbal communication. Although Spivak makes reference to this example of how a structure of knowledge can overturn another, Foucault's discussion still remains central to European history, to a Western discourse. Spivak suggests that this overturning of an episteme through "overhaul" and "redefinition" extends past the confines of European thought, pointing out that a European episteme is not the only component of a Western history of imperialism. She asks, "But what if that particular redefinition was only a part of the narrative of history in Europe as well as in the colonies? What if the two projects of epistemic overhaul worked as dislocated and unacknowledged parts of a vast two-handed engine?" (Spivak, *A Critique* 2115). Through exposing and questioning the Western narrative, Spivak prompts us to consider what the "dislocated and unacknowledged parts" of that narrative are.

Once again, she refers to Foucault for terminology, using his phrase "subjugated knowledge" as a way to begin understanding what has been left out of the study of the Western episteme. In *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, Foucault provides a definition for "subjugated knowledge," saying:

> By subjugated knowledges I mean two things: on the one hand, I am referring to the historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemization…On the other hand, I believe that by subjugated knowledges one should understand…a whole

> set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated. (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 81-2)

For Spivak, "subjugated knowledge" constitutes the very "subtext" of colonial imperialism (Spivak, *A Critique* 2115). It is a "subtext" not only because it is the imperialist colonizer's attempt to bury "the trace of that Other in its precarious Subjectivity," but also because it functions as an undercurrent to the Western historical narrative (Spivak, *A Critique* 2115). Through an understanding of the "subtext," it becomes possible to begin examining the "narrative of reality" that has historically served "as the normative one" (Spivak, *A Critique* 2115). While using Foucault's example of madness to explain the emergence of a discourse that becomes dominant and "normative," Spivak also puts forth an example of her own that steps outside an analysis of internal European systems: the "narrative of codification" (Spivak, A *Critique* 2116). To elaborate on what she means by codification, she offers up "British codification of Hindu Law," which sought to replace the Hindu episteme of the "polymorphous structure of legal performance" with a British episteme of a "binary vision" (Spivak, *A Critique* 2116). Along with law, the British regime involved an assault on education, a bifurcation of Sanskrit studies (Spivak, *A Critique* 2116). Spivak's example is an effective one, for it demonstrates the incredible efforts to erase and subjugate the other. After all, this British control of education certainly played a crucial role in the interpellation of Indians into a class of complicit subjects ready to cater to the British needs. In order to operate their empire and continue their rapid expansion into the Indian subcontinent, the British recognized the need for the natives to learn enough English to run the administration of the territories brought under the

imperialism of the empire (Gilmour 12). The first step towards this means was the Charter Act of 1813 (SarDesai 235). In the Charter Act of 1813, the British government decided to promote public education and chose to allot 10,000 pounds to the project (SarDesai 235). The act stated that its purpose was "for revival and improvement of literature, encouragement of the learned natives of India and for introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences among the inhabitants of the British territory in India," a rather ambitious goal for a country that had initially begun a relationship with India with just the idea of trade as its major focus (SarDesai 235).However, this act was just the beginning of Britain's control over the education of the natives in India. After this initial assertion by the British to control education in the Charter Act of 1813, the British continued to tighten their grip on the establishment and management of the education of the natives. For example, in 1833, Thomas Babington Macaulay arrived in India (Gilmour 14). Serving on the council of the governor-general, he was appointed to a committee in 1835 to discuss the medium of instruction to be employed in public schools in India (Gilmour 15). Since the committee was divided fifty-fifty over the issue of using Sanskrit and Arabic, which were being taught in the schools supported by the East India Company, or using English, Macaulay used his vote as chair to determine the outcome of the committee: English would be the medium of instruction (SarDesai 236). He made this decision through the reasoning that the English language was simply superior to the native languages of Arabic and Sanskrit. Though a scholar, he was not a scholar of Arabic or Sanskrit but made the arrogant statement: "I have never found one among in them [Orientalists] who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia" (Macaulay qtd. in

Gilmour 13). Moreover, of Sanskrit, he concluded, "It is I believe no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England" (Macaulay qtd. in Gilmour 14). Macaulay, in the role of the dominant colonizer, devalued the traditional Indian languages and sought to eradicate any traces of the "subjugated knowledge" that might threaten a complete and total process of domination. Though his claims were not grounded in the basis of fact, the rest of his committee did not question his claims, and English, under his direction and advisement, was determined by the British to be the best mode of instruction for the Indian population since the native languages were so obviously inferior to English in the British mindset (SarDesai 237). From this point onward, the British, having deemed English as the proper language in which to educate the natives, by no means loosened their hold over the system of education in India. Under the administration of the Governor-General Dalhousie, the Education Dispatch of 1854 allowed for the establishment of a grants-in-aid system, the establishment of education departments in every province in India, and the establishment of universities in the major Indian cities modeled on the university in London (Wood 199). As a result, in 1857, universities modeled on the Western style of education were established in Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta, ironically with English literature, including the works of Shakespeare, being taught in the Indian universities even before being fully accepted and incorporated into the curriculum employed in Western universities (Wood 200). The implementation of English in education accomplished the short-term goal of creating an educated Indian elite that could serve as manpower to fuel the

administrative machine of the British Empire. In other words, the use of English accomplished Macaulay's short-term goal of creating a class "Indian in blood" but English "in intellect" (Macaulay qtd. in Gilmour 13).

Spivak's historical reference to Macaulay and British control through systems of law and education helps us to understand how the colonizer separates himself from the colonized through controlling knowledge and language. In order to function in the society, the colonized is encouraged to adopt the language of the oppressor. However, as we can see from the writings of V.S. Naipaul and Frantz Fanon, merely possessing the language of the colonizer does not necessarily allow the colonized other to achieve any particular level of control or power within the system. Epistemic violence is an exercise in achieving mimicry, not producing independent thinkers. Societies form subjects that mirror the society through ideological state apparatuses, institutions such as the media, politics, law, religious organizations, and especially education, which dominate the ideology of the subjects and preserve the subjects' adoption and mimicry of that ideology (Althusser 42). Interestingly, Althusser deems education the most powerful ideological state apparatus (Althusser 46) for the successful completion of interpellation, the process by which individuals become subjects through society's ideological control of them (Althusser 34). Because of the ideology that the British imposed on the natives through the ideological state apparatus of education, which encouraged the colonized to view Indian systems of learning and traditional Indian languages as inferior to the British process of learning and the English language, it is no wonder that the colonized subject such as Ralph Singh in V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967) acts as a colonized, educated protagonist writing about a feeling of

dislocation even within language and learning itself. The protagonist, Ralph, having been educated at Oxford, still assumes the role of a subject trying to mirror the image of the colonizer even in his use of the English language. Though he sets out to write a memoir in the English language, he never quite reaches a level of comfort with his own writing. While trying to achieve a certain "closeness to power" through writing down his thoughts, he expresses that he, as a colonial politician, finds himself without power. He says, "Above all, we lack power, and we do not understand that we lack power. We mistake words and the acclamation of words for power" (Naipaul 10-11). However, though he finds nothing but a sense of "disorder" in London and compares his cultural isolation to the feeling of being "shipwrecked" (Naipaul 32), he nevertheless closes his memoir by associating himself more with English culture than he does with any other culture and contemplating the possibility of joining the United Nations or writing British history (Naipaul 300-1). This feeling of dislocation experienced by colonized subjects because of the displacement of native language and simultaneous enforcement of the language of the oppressor is a problem that the theorist Frantz Fanon points out in his book *Black Skin White Masks* (1952). Speaking of the situation in Martinique where black subjects endured colonization and deployment of the French language, he says, "Every colonized people…finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country" (Fanon 18). However, Fanon does not simply stop with the idea that language is another way in which the colonizer secures the subjugation of the colonized, but also goes on to explain that, though the language of the colonizer relegates the colonized to the background, how the colonized uses that language reflects the degree to which the colonized can emulate the colonizer

(Fanon 18-19). In other words, according to Fanon, the colonized will become "whiter" or more like the colonizer in proportion to how he or she handles the language of the colonizer (Fanon 18). Thus, in this process of trying to emulate the language of the colonizer, the colonized becomes self-conscious of how he or she is using the language and continuously tries to improve his or her pronunciation, or his or her ability to mirror the colonizer (Fanon 18). Therefore, like the colonized who began to see themselves as French because of their French education and immersion in French language (Fanon 21), Ralph Singh ends up seeing himself as more British than anything else, an effect of the ideology of British education that proposes that the oppressive colonizers are the superior race that should be emulated by the inferior race.

Although Spivak alerts us to such instances of epistemic violence that have greatly shaped the events of history and that demonstrate the power of knowledge, education, and ideology in establishing binaries between superior and inferior, subjugator and subjugated, she warns her readers not to presume that just locating a site of such violence allows the analyzing intellectual to uncover the voice of the Other, the voice of "subjugated knowledge." She raises a worthwhile question: how can the voice of subjugation then know and speak for the subjugated? How can the silenced of colonization speak? The works of Naipaul and Fanon show that those who speak for the subjugated are those who have learned the language of the oppressors. Both Naipaul and Fanon published works about subjection, colonization, and interpellation in the colonizer's tongue. Therefore, Spivak is interested in the voices of those who have not been educated, who have not been interpellated. Spivak suggests that we can never hear the voices of countless bodies silenced. She argues "that the Other as Subject is

inaccessible to Foucault and Deleuze," whose very "cultural explanations" of a system that continues to organize and subjugate knowledge reflect "the epistemic violence of the legal project" (Spivak, *A Critique* 2116). Moreover, she remains critical of efforts made by scholars, such as Foucault and Deleuze, to assert knowledge of the oppressed. After all, in situations like that of slavery, mimicry is not even the desired goal. A slaveholder who dominates knowledge does so for subjection. In this case, interpellation focuses on maintaining control and adjusting the slave to the ultimate power of the slave-owner. Mimicry arises from learning one's place in the system of slavery, from accepting the prevailing ideology of power. Slaves are not even supposed to speak within the prevailing language; they are to accept that the language prevails over them. A discussion of British interpellation enlightens the reality of epistemic violence, but it cannot fully explain the reality of interpellating a slave into a complicit servant. Thus, Spivak suggests that we cannot hear what the truly subjected say; we cannot hear them speak. How can they? She says,

> Let us now move to consider the margins (one can just as well say the silent, silenced center) of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, Aboriginals, and the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat. According to Foucault and Deleuze (in the First World, under the standardization and regimentation of socialized capital, though they do not seem to recognize this)…the oppressed, if given the chance (the problem of representation cannot be bypassed here), and on the way to solidarity through alliance politics (a Marxist thematic is at work here) *can speak and know their*

conditions. (Spivak, *A Critique* 2117)

However, keeping in mind the imperialist conditions that frame the "conditions" of the oppressed, Spivak questions how those with no direct access to those imperial conditions can possibly express themselves within a framework that dictates knowledge as it relates to the betterment and proliferation of the ideologies of the imperialist agenda. She responds to this idea of speaking by saying, "We must now confront the following question: On the other side of the international division of labor from socialized capital, inside *and* outside the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text, *can the subaltern speak*?" (Spivak, *A Critique* 2117). In a 1992 interview, Spivak further elaborates on her definition of the subaltern. She argues that the term *subaltern* is not merely a synonym for "the oppressed"; rather, at least in her use of it, it relates to a lack of access to the imperialist system that frames one's existence. She states that, while "everybody thinks the subaltern is just a classy word for oppressed, for Other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie," her view of Gramsci's term is that it ultimately relates to one's relationship to the prevailing imperialism (Spivak, "Interview" 45).

From her perspective, "everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern—a space of difference" (Spivak, "Interview" 45). Since epistemic violence involves, for Spivak, supplanting an already existing system, such as law or education, with an imperialist worldview, it would seem that this kind of violence takes into account those who are familiar with at least one of the two epistemes, the "subjugated knowledge" or the imperialist knowledge, and who experience the transplantation and invasion of the replacing episteme. Within this

system, one can learn to speak the language of the imperialist and begin to reflect the imposing episteme "in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Macaulay 249) or resist that language at the expense of being considered not "fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population" (Macaulay 249). However, what about those who do not possess the "subjugated knowledge" or the encroaching imperialist one? There is a space that becomes visible at the boundaries of epistemic violence; this space functions as a "silent, silenced center" because those inside of it stand outside of the space characterized by epistemic violence (Spivak, *A Critique* 2116). For Spivak then, the subaltern comes to represent that "space of difference," that place where the "margins…of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence" become visible (Spivak, *A Critique* 2116). Why is this space a place of silence? Returning to Spivak's initial example of epistemic violence, Foucault's discussion of madness helps to shed some light on the assertion Spivak makes regarding the position of the subaltern. Foucault views imprisonment of the insane as a silencing act also. In *Madness and Civilization*, he suggests that the shift from discussion to imprisonment produced a "mute dialogue" no longer heard by those attempting to investigate the limits of "reason and unreason" (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 262). Instead, "classical internment" closed off that dialogue and made those limits impossible to discuss outside of the new episteme (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 262). He summarizes the silencing effects of the prison, which created a separate space for those who did not assume a place in the episteme, saying,

> This dialogue itself was now disengaged; silence was absolute; there was no longer any common language between madness and reason; the

> language of delirium can be answered only by an absence of language, for delirium is not a fragment of dialogue with reason, it is not language at all; it refers, in an ultimately silent awareness, only to transgression. And it is only at this point that a common language becomes possible again, insofar as it will be one of acknowledged guilt. (Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* 262)

This example of madness works well within Spivak's theory because it not only reflects the power of epistemic violence to effect substantial change and ordering in a given episteme, the process of the "overhaul," but it also shows how a circle of silence can encompass those at the "margins," the places of exclusion.

Speaking in Death

It is within this space of silence that we can then begin to situate Sethe's experiences in *Beloved*. As bell hooks demonstrates in the preface to her book *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*, being in the margins is certainly a component of American history for African Americans. Making clear the marginal experience of oppressed, discriminated people, she says,

> To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. As black Americans living in a small Kentucky town, the railroad tracks were a daily reminder of our marginality. Across those tracks were paved streets, stores we could not enter…We could enter that world but we could not live there. We had always to return to the margin, to cross the tracks, to shacks and abandoned houses on the edge of town. (hooks, Preface ix)

In addition to discrimination, bell hooks also reminds her readers of the consummate experience of marginality, discrimination, and racism: slavery. She laments, "There were laws to ensure our return. To not return was to risk being punished" (hooks, Preface ix). Although living under the law of "return," the Fugitive Act of 1850, Sethe manages to escape slavery, fleeing Kentucky to seek safety in Ohio, she does not escape the "silent, silenced center" of the margins. As a black woman and a slave, Sethe experiences what hooks terms "the absence of choices" (hooks, *Feminist Theory* 5). For women at the margins, women who occupy this position of the subaltern, absence characterizes their existence.

Unlike Sixo, who understands the "language of the oppressors" and demonstrates his "ability to reason and to manipulate [that] language" (King 275-6), Sethe remains somewhat unaware of the intellectual harm of the schoolteacher's oppressive episteme; of the slaves at Sweet Home, Sixo demonstrates most clearly a sense of who he is as a person and of how the episteme of the plantation interferes in the "behaviors, traditions, and customs that feel natural, right, or comfortable to him" (King 275). Sixo represents "local knowledge" that persists in spite of the schoolteacher's attempts to replace that knowledge with his own. Unafraid to operate outside of the rules and regulations of the plantation, he leaves the Sweet Home plantation at his discretion, puts together an escape plan, and sustains an unsanctioned romantic relationship without the knowledge or permission of his masters (King 274-5). Moreover, although he speaks English (Morrison, *Beloved* 21), the "language of the oppressors," he appropriates the language for his own needs (King 276). When accused of stealing a shoat, he uses this language in a "clever" way to outwit the schoolteacher,

replacing the negative connotation of "stealing" with the more positive connotation of "improving property," telling him, "Sixo plant rye to give the high piece a better chance. Sixo take and feed the soil, give you more crop. Sixo take and feed Sixo give you more work" (Morrison, *Beloved* 190). Although Sixo understands the system, he is, at least temporarily, able to subvert its aims.

However, while Sixo resists from a position he occupies within the very episteme used to control him, a "system that defines him as less than human" (King 275), Sethe is unable to seize resistance *within* the system. She says,

> Schoolteacher was teaching us things we couldn't learn. I didn't care nothing about the measuring string. We all laughed about that—except Sixo. He didn't laugh at nothing. But I didn't care. Schoolteacher'd wrap that string all over my head, 'cross my nose, around my behind. Number my teeth. I thought he was a fool. And the questions he asked was the biggest foolishness of all. (Morrison, *Beloved* 191)

While Sixo possesses a knowledge of the episteme of scientific racism as it is employed by the schoolteacher, Sethe does not even have the opportunity to go to school to learn this system of knowledge. One day, she overhears a lesson the schoolteacher is giving. He instructs his students to analyze Sethe by listing "her human characteristics on the left [side of the page]; her animal ones on the right" (Morrison, *Beloved* 193). Puzzled by the word *characteristics*, she asks Mrs. Garner for clarification, and Mrs. Garner, barely offering up the synonym *features* as an answer, instead refocuses Sethe's attention on performing the work at hand: "Change the water, Sethe. This is warm…Water, Sethe. Cool water" (Morrison, *Beloved* 194). Unlike Sixo, who leaves

Sweet Home to develop an alternative knowledge to the one being taught by the schoolteacher, Sethe attempts to acquire knowledge about the system by seeking answers within the system but is ultimately unable to do so. Just at the moment when Sethe then begins formulating questions about the nature of *features*, this other foreign word about which Mrs. Garner informs her, Mrs. Garner gives her another command: "Come away from that window and listen…Ask my brother-in-law to come up after supper" (Morrison, *Beloved* 195). Sethe simply does not get the opportunity to develop any sense of a discourse of *characteristics* and cannot very easily conceive of a reaction to a concept she does not understand. She does not say anything when she hears the schoolteacher talking about her; instead, she walks away and silently thinks about what she has heard (Morrison, *Beloved* 193).

As a woman, Sethe encounters some challenges that the slave men at Sweet Home do not. Spivak, in addition to highlighting class issues that arise from the imposition of an episteme that attempts to divide the population into specific categories (Spivak, *A Critique* 1118), also raises the issue of gender operating within the drive towards the establishment of nationalist consciousness. She says, "The subordinated gender following the dominant within the challenge of nationalism while remaining caught within gender oppression is not an unknown story" (Spivak, *A Critique* 1118). In *Beloved*, Morrison demonstrates this "gender oppression" in American nationalism through the incredibly cruel treatment that Sethe, a slave girl, endures. Although it is certainly clear within the context of Sweet Home that both the male slaves and female slaves answer to their masters, there are ways in which Sethe's gender places her at an even lower tier of existence than her fellow male counterparts. For instance, while

Halle, "the Pauls," and Sixo attend school, which gives Sixo the opportunity to learn white knowledge and speak back to it, Sethe only overhears the learning that takes place (Morrison, *Beloved* 193-4). Even if this learning constitutes racist thought, Sethe has no access to it.

Just as "the possibility of collectivity itself is persistently foreclosed through the manipulation of female agency," pitting men and women against each other (Spivak, *A Critique* 2117), so the schoolteacher presents a lesson in which the male pupils position themselves against Sethe, using the language they are learning to explain her "features." In this lesson, Sethe is "talked about," by men, as an object instead of as a subject (hooks, *Feminist Theory* 126). However, Sethe does not have the language to combat the rhetoric used to describe her and rightly seems to stand as an exemplary figure of Spivak's assertion of "woman as subaltern," woman as silenced possessor of no access to the system in which she overhears herself operating (Spivak, *A Critique* 2117). Even though she wishes for more clarification, she acknowledges that there was "nobody to ask" about such things, at least no other female (Morrison, *Beloved* 159). She says, "Mrs. Garner never had no children and we was the only women there" (Morrison, *Beloved* 159). She and Mrs. Garner may have been the "only women there," but Sethe remains alone in a category Mrs. Garner could never understand: slave woman. Sethe experiences tremendous physical abuse regarding her lactating breasts, abuse that only a woman could experience. Moreover, it is abuse that only this slave woman endures at Sweet Home. This abuse not only affects Sethe, but it also affects her children. What would it feel like to be deprived of her milk, her way of feeding her children? How could young boys rape her breasts, assume control of her body, and leave her scarred

and broken? Describing to Paul D this abuse, Sethe says, "After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it…Them boys found out I told on em. Schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree" (Morrison, *Beloved* 17). These men had opened up her body, left scars that were bleeding, broken, bruised. They had beaten her so thoroughly and so severely that the scars on her back formed lines, formed the outline of a tree permanently tattooed into her flesh. Although Paul D is sympathetic and demonstrates his surprise at the fact that these males would "beat you and you was pregnant," Sethe maintains that men cannot possibly "know what it's like to send your children off when your breasts are full," for the plan all along had been for Sethe to get her children to the wagon that would take them to freedom and then come to feed them (Morrison, *Beloved* 16-17). Her experience is uniquely female; it encompasses maternal feelings that even Paul D, though he cares about Sethe's past, cannot comprehend. From this perspective, it is not difficult then to appreciate Horvitz's argument that "[m]other-daughter bonding and bondage suffuses Morrison's text" (Horvitz 94). After all, this instance of abuse represents an interference in that bonding between a lactating mother and a nursing child. As the slaveholders separate Sethe from her role as mother and, in turn, participate in the separation between Sethe and Beloved, so these two boys separate Sethe from the wagon holding her children.

While the children manage to make it to freedom with Baby Suggs, Sethe remains behind in this moment, only to bemoan the loss of her milk, a component of her maternal role. Once again, the schoolteacher plays an important role in Sethe's interaction regarding males, white males in this case. Not only does the schoolteacher

encourage the slaves to describe her "human" and "animal" characteristics, but he also allows the white boys to exert physical violence on Sethe since she had "told on em," since she had dared to speak a language that was not hers. Moreover, the schoolteacher assumes this right to violence, this right to punishment inflicted on the body, a right that remains rooted in the Western episteme. hooks posits "that it is in the context of the traditional Western family with its authoritarian male rule and its authoritarian adult rule that most of us are socialized to accept group oppression and the use of force to uphold authority" (hooks, *Feminist Theory* 120). When Sethe threatens that system of male authority that supports a male hierarchy from the nephews to the schoolmaster, she brings to bear the need to protect the system from the threat. As hooks suggests, "[T]he power the dominant party exercises is maintained by the threat (acted upon or not) that abusive punishment, physical or psychological, could be used if the hierarchical structure is threatened" (hooks, *Feminist Theory* 120). As a white male, the schoolteacher displays his "domination of women" through extending to Sethe, a black female, the "use of force" (hooks, *Feminist Theory* 120).

If Sethe is a representative of "woman as subaltern," if she cannot speak back to the schoolteacher who molds a perception of her "characteristics" and endorses physical violence against her pregnant body, how can she engage in resistance? How can she keep her daughter safe from the oppression of the schoolteacher? Hearing that the schoolteacher is coming for her children, she cuts her daughter's throat. When the schoolteacher, nephew, sheriff, and slave catcher enter the home, Sethe does "not stop to look at them"; at this point, she already holds the dead baby (Morrison, *Beloved* 149). This act of violence seems too overwhelming to consider; it forces us to think: how

could a mother take the life of her own daughter? Morrison demonstrates that violence is much more complex than that. Spivak describes a female death and argues that it functions as a subaltern's attempt to speak. She gives the following story:

> A young woman of sixteen or seventeen, Bhubaneswari Bhaduri, hanged herself in her father's modest apartment in North Calcutta in 1926. The suicide was a puzzle since, as Bhubaneswari was menstruating at the time, it was clearly not a case of illicit pregnancy. Nearly a decade later, it was discovered, in a letter she had left for her elder sister, that she was a member of one of the many groups involved in the armed struggle for Indian independence. She had been entrusted with a political assassination. Unable to confront the task and yet aware of the practical need for trust, she killed herself. (Spivak, *A Critique* 2123)

Although the circumstances surrounding Bhaduri's death and Beloved's death are quite different, a discussion of this example provided by Spivak nevertheless draws some interesting parallels. First, the most obvious parallel is that of the inability to speak. Just as Spivak makes it clear that Bhaduri did not want to risk the mission by voicing her concern with being able to carry it out, so Sethe, as we have seen, also lacks the ability to exert her voice in the circumstances in which she finds herself.

Second, of Bhaduri's case, Spivak notes that Bhaduri purposefully waited until her menstruation began in order not to leave the impression that she had committed a sexual transgression. She says, "Bhubaneswari had known that her death would be diagnosed as the outcome of illegitimate passion. She had therefore waited for the onset of menstruation" (Spivak *A Critique* 2123). In the same way that Bhaduri attempts to

ensure that her act will not be misinterpreted, so Sethe tries to explain her reasoning behind her act of violence against her daughter: love. When Paul D confronts her about the truth regarding Beloved, she justifies her action as the manifestation of love. She argues that, after escaping from Kentucky and finding refuge in Ohio, she felt more love for the children. She tells Paul D, "Look like I loved em more after I got here. Or maybe I couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love. But when I got here, when I jumped down off that wagon—there wasn't nobody in the world I couldn't love if I wanted to" (Morrison, *Beloved* 162).

Out of this love for her children, the children that were hers "to love" in Ohio, Sethe explains that she simply could not allow them to return to Sweet Home, to a place where the schoolteacher would be in control. She says, "I couldn't let all that go back to where it was, and I couldn't let her [Beloved] nor any of em live under schoolteacher. That was out" (Morrison, *Beloved* 163). She not only explains her line of reasoning to Paul D, as Bhaduri did to her sister in the letter left behind and in the evidence of the menstruation, but she also thinks to herself how she will explain her point of view to Beloved, the daughter she refused to send back to Sweet Home, the daughter she loved "too thick" in Ohio (Morrison, *Beloved* 164). She thinks, "I didn't have time to explain before because it had to be done quick. Quick. She had to be safe and I put her where she would be…I'll explain to her, even though I don't have to. Why I did it. How if I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her" (Morrison, *Beloved* 200).

The third and perhaps most interesting parallel between Bhaduri's and Sethe's actions is the idea that these women reconstruct "social texts" for their own purposes

(Spivak, *A Critique* 2123). Spivak asserts, "Bhubaneswari…perhaps rewrote the social text of *sati*-suicide in an interventionist way" (Spivak, *A Critique* 2123). By waiting for her menstruation before committing suicide, Bhaduri refutes the two signifying gestures that accompany *sati*-suicide: love of a man and cleanliness of mourning widow. Neither of these elements usually associated with the socially acceptable interpretation of *sati*-suicide remains. Instead, Bhaduri displaced these accoutrements of *sati*-suicide and engaged in the act under her own terms. Of her ability to create a suicidal act outside of the normative bounds, Spivak remarks, "She generalized the sanctioned motive for female suicide by taking immense trouble to displace (not merely deny), in the physiological inscription of her body, its imprisonment within legitimate passion by a single male" (Spivak, *A Critique* 2123). In other words, she demonstrated that her death was explicitly not for the purpose of a relationship with a man; she removed the prerequisite of "male" from a female's choice to commit suicide. In addition, she subverted the requirement stating that a woman must be clean before she can perform the sacred ritual. Instead, Spivak observes, "The displacing gesture—waiting for menstruation—is at first a reversal of the interdict against a menstruating widow's right to immolate herself; the unclean widow must wait, publicly, until the cleansing bath of the fourth day, when she is no longer menstruating, in order to claim her dubious privilege" (Spivak, *A Critique* 2123). Once again, Bhaduri's death demonstrates her refusal to follow such social codes. She takes her own life while physically unable to fulfill the social requirements, and she also refuses to engage in a public display of cleanliness, for she kills herself in a private ceremony that upends all necessary requirements of the ritual.

Although not retelling *sati*-suicide, Sethe, in her own way, also rewrites a "social text," a text put forth by the schoolteacher. If we return to the relationship between the schoolteacher and Sixo, it becomes apparent that the schoolteacher engages in a "social text," a public spectacle of punishing his unruly slave by death. Just as he engages in violence against Sethe's body when she threatens his authority, so he seeks a permanent resolution to the problem of Sixo's insubordination. Bemoaning the leniency with which Mr. Garner, the former slave-owner at Sweet Home, handled the slaves, the schoolteacher, discussing the issue of Sixo with fellow white men, hears the other men's critiques of Mr. Garner's policies: "There's laws against what he done: letting niggers hire out their own time to buy themselves. He even let em have guns! And you think he mated them niggers to get him some more? Hell no! He planned for them to marry! If that don't beat all!" (Morrison, *Beloved* 126). Concurring with these men regarding "the problems" of slave ownership, he "sighs and says doesn't he know it?" (Morrison, *Beloved* 126). In order to deal with these "problems," the schoolteacher and his white comrades kill Sixo. Initially, they attempt to set him on fire, but Sixo continues to sing. Since he will not stop singing, not stop being "a highly disruptive presence in a system that defines him as less than human" (King 275), the schoolteacher issues a death sentence, proclaiming, "This one will never be suitable" (Morrison, *Beloved* 226). As the slaveholder, the schoolteacher assumes power over the lives of the slaves. In *Society Must Be Defended*, Foucault articulates a very specific relationship between the sovereign and the power over life, which is essentially the power to take that life, to kill. He says, "Sovereign power's effect on life is exercised only when the sovereign can kill. The very essence of the right of life and death is actually the right to

kill: it is at the moment when the sovereign can kill that he exercises his right over life. It is essentially the right of the sword" (Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* 240). Building on this Foucauldian notion of the sovereign's "power over life," Achille Mbembe in "Necropolitics" concurs, saying that "the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (Mbembe 11).

While the white men had approached the escaping Sixo with the intent "to capture, not kill" (Morrison, *Beloved* 226), they nevertheless easily adapt to the new plan. However, it is important to note that capture is the first goal. After all, the slave "is an instrument of labor, the slave has a price. As a property, he or she has a value. His or her labor is needed and used" (Mbembe 21). When the slave no longer fulfills this function of labor, the slaveholder engages in the necessary measures to ensure compliance. If the master does not receive the labor expected from the slave, he will engage in violence of any required means. Mbembe notes,

> The slave is therefore kept alive but in a state of injury, in a phantom-like world of horrors and intense cruelty and profanity. The violent tenor of the slave's life is manifested through the overseer's disposition to behave in a cruel and intemperate manner and in the spectacle of pain inflicted on the slave's body. Violence, here, becomes an element in manners, like whipping or taking of the slave's life itself. (Mbembe 21)

As if the schoolteacher is merely making a socially polite decision to rid society of an unruly slave, he decides that Sixo, no longer fulfilling the position of labor assigned to him, deserves a punishment of violence against the body. When the fire

refuses to burn the threat to authority, they "shoot him to shut him up. Have to" (Morrison, *Beloved* 226). The schoolteacher chose to perform "an act of caprice and pure destruction aimed at instilling terror" (Mbembe 21). He makes it clear that "[s]lave life, in many ways, is a form of death-in-life" (Mbembe 21). When Sixo was alive, his body remained in the control of the schoolteacher, and, in his death, he also remains the schoolteacher's property. The schoolteacher engages in a sense of sovereignty grounded purely in the belief that his white skin is superior to Sixo's black skin. Beautifully summarizing Foucault's notion of biopower, Mbembe connects its effectiveness to the ultimate racism it projects, noting that biopower "appears to function through dividing people into those who must live and those who must die" (Mbembe 16). This kind of ideological system resting on otherness as a grounds for exclusion utilizes biological difference as a determining factor and seizes control of that difference for the purpose of marking self from other, white from black, master from slave. Focusing on this issue of control, Mbembe writes,

> Operating on the basis of a split between the living and the dead, such a power defines itself in relation to a biological field—which it takes control of and vests itself in. This control presupposes the distribution of human species into groups, the subdivision of the population into subgroups, and the establishment of a biological caesura between the ones and the others. This is what Foucault labels with the (at first sight familiar) term *racism*. (Mbembe 17)

For Mbembe, it is no surprise that racism has played such a fundamental role in shaping the concept of biopower and its implications because of its pervasive influence

in the development of Western history. He laments, "After all, more so than class-thinking (the ideology that defines history as an economic struggle of classes), race has been the ever present shadow in Western political thought and practice, especially when it comes to imagining the inhumanity of, or rule over, foreign peoples" (Mbembe 17). The schoolteacher in *Beloved* becomes the human face for this cruel reality of inhumanity. The schoolteacher's actions, approved by the white men, create a powerful "social text" that says murder of slaves, particularly rebellious ones, is acceptable. However clear of a message this "text" presents, Sethe nevertheless manages to subvert it. In a quite obvious reversal of roles, Sethe takes the schoolteacher's place and exercises the violence the "dominant party" calls at his own disposal to put down threats against authority (hooks, *Feminist Theory* 120). Although not the sovereign, she exerts the fullest "limits of sovereignty" over life and death (Mbembe 11). Whereas the schoolteacher shoots to shut up, Sethe cuts to shut up. Unlike Sixo, Beloved will never have to answer the schoolteacher's questions or sing for her life. Sethe shuts up Beloved's ability to speak so that she will never have to speak to the schoolteacher at all. Moreover, while the schoolteacher uses violence to punish Sixo, Sethe employs that same violence to demonstrate the power of her love. In the same way that Bhaduri "attempted to 'speak' by turning her body into a text of woman/writing" (Spivak, *A Critique* 2124), Sethe speaks by converting her daughter's body into a text of resistance.

In the case of Bhaduri, Spivak expresses sadness at the thought that the dead girl's body did not speak the message of her freedom achieved through death. She notes the reactions she received when first investigating Bhaduri's case, recalling, "Two responses: (a) Why, when her two sisters…led such full and wonderful lives, are you

interested in the hapless Bhubaneswari? (b) I asked her nieces. It appears that it was a case of illicit love" (Spivak, *A Critique* 2123). Indeed, like the acts of insanity committed by a silenced, imprisoned madman, her "act became absurd, a case of delirium rather than sanity" (Spivak, *A Critique* 2123). Similarly, the schoolteacher fails to interpret the far-reaching implications of Sethe's actions, thinking that she was insane, that "she'd gone wild due to the mishandling of the nephew who'd overbeat her," and asking, "What she want to go and do that for?" (Morrison, *Beloved* 150). Even Paul D believes she made a mistake and, employing the knowledge he learned from the schoolteacher, scolds her for making an animalistic decision, "You got two feet, Sethe, not four" (Morrison, *Beloved* 165). Since there is no room for an outside interpretation in the case of Bhaduri or Sethe, Spivak might seem initially persuasive in declaring that "the subaltern cannot speak!" (Spivak, *A Critique* 2123). However, she does concede to some opponents of her assertion, noting that "after all, I am able to read Bhubaneswari's case, and therefore she *has* spoken in some way" (Spivak, *A Critique* 2124). In the same fashion, although Paul D and the schoolteacher fail to hear her speak and are quick to shut up her discourse, Sethe has spoken: "I stopped him" (Morrison, *Beloved* 164). Cutting her baby's throat stopped him. Dismembering her sweet baby's body stopped him. She stopped him.

On another planation in another novel, the impact of Bhubaneswari's suicide speaks again as Alice, a slave woman stripped of her husband and children, hangs in the home of her white owner. Octavia Butler's 1979 novel *Kindred* addresses many of the same issues brought to life by *Beloved*. Like Sethe, Alice Greenwood finds herself at the center of an exclusionary discourse, and, like Bhubaneswari, she uses her own body

as a statement against it. The novel's protagonist, Dana Franklin, an African American who travels through time, leaving California in 1976 and subsequently arriving in Maryland in 1815, is the one who discovers the horrific scene of Alice's death. In the same place where Dana herself had received a whipping from Tom Weylin, a slaveholder viewing this twentieth-century woman as a nineteenth-century slave, she sees the body:

> I turned to the place where I had been strung up and whipped—and jumped back in surprise when I saw that someone was hanging there. Hanging by the neck. A woman. Alice. I stared at her not believing, not wanting to believe…I touched her and her flesh was cold and hard. The dead gray face was ugly in death as it had never been in life. The mouth was open. The eyes were open and staring. (Butler 248)

Although this picture of death is gruesome, the novel makes it clear that Alice has no sense of agency in her own life. While technically a black woman who is "free, born free like her mother" (Butler 28), she cannot escape the cruelties of slavery. Upon marrying a slave named Isaac and attempting to help him escape, Alice suffers rape, enslavement, and forced concubinage at the hands of Rufus Weylin, heir to his father's plantation. Because she attempts to run away, Rufus sends her children to a family member in Baltimore under the pretense that he has sold her children into slavery. Defending this action, Rufus tells Dana that he did it "[t]o punish her, to scare her. To make her see what could happen if she didn't…if she tried to leave me" (Butler 251).

Like Sethe's action to protect her daughter from being someone's slave, from being someone's property, Alice's suicide is a direct refusal to continue operating as the

"instrument of labor…[a]s a property" (Mbembe 21). This act indicates that she will no longer be a producer of labor; Rufus can no longer command her body for labor. She effectively refuses to participate in the economy of the slave plantation, for her death permanently prohibits her contribution to the labor force Rufus continues to exploit, just as his father did before Rufus inherited the plantation. For her, death is a permanent day off from work. Mbembe notes this anti-laborious characteristic of death, saying, "Death is therefore the very principle of excess—an *anti-economy*. Hence the metaphor of luxury and of *the luxurious character of death*" (Mbembe 15). As a non-laboring slave, Alice epitomizes this picture of an "anti-economy." She will never participate in the economy of her enslavement again. Through taking her own life, she chooses a more luxurious option than being "[t]reated as if he or she no longer existed except as a mere tool and instrument of production" (Mbembe 22). Deprived of her husband, freedom, and children, Alice prepares for death much in the same way that Bhubaneswari waited for her menstrual cycle to begin. Dana takes notice of the planning underscoring the dead woman's appearance. She sees that "[h]er dress was dark red and her apron clean and white. She wore shoes that Rufus had made specifically for her, not the rough heavy shoes or boots other slaves wore. It was as though she had dressed up and combed her hair and then…" (Butler 248). From her clothing to the rope that "had been tied to a wall peg, thrown over a beam" (Butler 248), nothing about Alice's death is accidental. Alice had gotten up, gotten dressed, and prepared herself for her final day of a lifetime of labor for a cruel oppressor. Although Dana initially determines that Alice "did it to herself. Hung herself" (Butler 249), Sarah, a slave at the Weylin household, argues that Rufus is responsible for her death. She says, "He did it…Even if he didn't

put the rope on her, he drove her to it. He sold her babies!" (Butler 249). Just as Sethe reacts to the schoolteacher's threat to her child's freedom by cutting the neck of his future victim, so Alice puts a rope around her own neck, for she is already a victim. She is "tired of havin' a bit in my mouth" (Butler 236). For her lost children, Alice had tried to use her voice; Sarah recalls that Alice "was screaming and crying and carrying on" (Butler 250). In spite of her grief, Rufus never revealed the truth about her children to her, and Alice decided that she would not scream or cry for them again. Although Alice is unable to change Rufus, her actions temporarily silence him also. When Dana questions him about Alice's death, he refuses to answer her about anything regarding the woman's decision to commit suicide. The text continues to repeat, "He didn't answer…He didn't answer…He didn't answer" (Butler 248-250). At least in reference to her own abuse, to her own suffering, she stopped him; she stopped him; she stopped him.

While parallels between Sethe's murder of her daughter and Alice's suicide are numerous, the novel *Kindred* complicates a discussion of epistemic violence, speaking, and Spivak's definition of the subaltern. Like Sethe, Alice is indeed illiterate in terms of her inability to read and write. After all, she expresses to Dana that, even if Rufus grants her children papers outlining freedom, she will need Dana "to read them to me" (Butler 236). Moreover, slaves on the Weylin plantation suffer harsh punishments for any efforts to gain knowledge. As Sixo burns in the flames for his attempt to position himself in a discourse meant to exclude him, so Dana endures a beating for reading. Having agreed to teach Nigel how to read, Dana picks up the speller at just the same moment that Tom Weylin walks into the cookhouse. Yelling at her, he says, "I treated

you good…and you pay me back by stealing from me! Stealing my books! Reading!" (Butler 107). Recognizing that physical punishment is forthcoming, Dana tries to brace herself for the whip, which "came—like a hot iron across my back, burning into me through my light shirt, searing my skin" (Butler 107). Like the nineteenth-century Sethe, the twentieth-century Dana bears scars on her back from beatings imprinted on the body because of the institution of slavery. However, what is interesting about Dana's situation is that she is technically the most educated person on the plantation. An educated woman from the twentieth century, Dana is a writer in the present world. Then, during her trips to the antebellum South, Dana, with her husband Kevin, is the one who teaches Rufus to read and also reads to him for his entertainment. The superiors of the plantation, Tom and later Rufus, are her intellectual inferiors. Unlike the schoolteacher who utilizes scientific discourse to categorize Sethe, Sixo, and the other slaves at Sweet Home as subhuman, Tom and Rufus do not possess book knowledge with which to judge Dana. Furthermore, both father and son are aware of her intellectual advantage over them. Tom scolds his son for not reading as well as she can, saying, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself! A nigger can read better than you!" (Butler 102). However, Rufus quickly responds to this insult, retorting to his father, "She can read better than you too" (Butler 102). Frustrated by his son's comment, Tom tells Dana that she cannot continue reading to Rufus until he has decided she can. When Tom indicates that an appropriate period of time has passed for Rufus to consider his mistake, he allows Dana to begin reading to him again with a cautionary warning to Rufus: "I'm no schoolmaster…but I'll teach you if you can be taught. I'll teach you respect" (Butler 102).

Dana threatens a system that functions on the power of the white man. As a black woman, her education does not grant her some kind of access to the governing system; rather, it identifies her as a target, as a suspect. Dana has the ability to travel through time, but even she, a Western-educated woman from twentieth-century California, cannot escape the violence of slavery at the hands of those who are illiterate by current standards. She is an unusual character in that she possesses the knowledge of a literate person by modern assessment and nevertheless falls under the subjugation of slavery during her trips to the past. When she appears in the past, Rufus lets her know that she does not conform to his expectations of a black person's dress, behavior, and social mannerisms. He tells her, "You don't talk right or dress right or act right. You don't even seem like a runaway…And you don't call me 'Master' either" (Butler 30). Dana begins to understand that her life is in danger in this time period and that she will have to assume the appearance of a slave in order to survive. In the present, she prepares for her journeys by studying the era to which she continues to return. For example, packing a bag of items that could be helpful to her upon arriving back in time, Dana explains, "And I found a compact paperback history of slavery in America that might be useful. It listed dates and events that I should be aware of, and it contained a map of Maryland" (Butler 115). When interacting with Tom Weylin, she also relies on her Western knowledge, using the books she had read about slavery to guide her behavioral decisions (Butler 56). Through her investigation of the state during slavery, she attempts to help Rufus and Alice, her ancestors, and simultaneously to maintain her cover as a slave. One might think that Dana's position as an outsider in the culture and her knowledge of Maryland's institution of slavery would allow her to exert some kind

of power over Tom and Rufus. In *Power/Knowledge*, Foucault argues, "Once knowledge can be analysed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transposition, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power" (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 69).

However, Dana, though she academically understands the "process by which knowledge functions" in the role of slavery to allow white slaveholders to maintain control over slaves through prohibiting the acquisition of knowledge, remains unable to "capture" that process or contain it in spite of her study of the "region, domain, implantation, displacement, [or] transposition." Although she tries to teach Rufus about humanity and rights, encouraging him to remove racially inappropriate words from his vocabulary, she is ultimately unsuccessful, and Rufus becomes as cruel as his father, fulfilling the slaves' prediction that he would be as mean as Master Tom. Her knowledge does not grant her the power to change Tom or Rufus, save Alice from hanging herself, or even prevent physical punishments inflicted on her own body. If Spivak's use of the word *subaltern* refers to those with "limited or no access to the cultural imperialism" (Spivak, "Interview" 45), then Dana, someone who functions within the episteme of a modern-day existence as well as studies the episteme of a past social framework, also finds herself in a type of subaltern position as she remains in a center of silence. In the present, she cannot verbalize what is happening to her when she spatially and temporally occupies a persona in the nineteenth century. After her first trip to the past, Kevin tries to prompt her to explain what has happened to her. However, she sits "mute, trying to gather my thoughts, seeing the rifle again leveled at my head" (Butler 15). Initially, Kevin cannot process her narrative and leaves her to exclaim, "But

it was real! I was there!" (Butler 16). It is not until Kevin accompanies her on one of her trips that he can fully comprehend the experience, that he can begin to understand her pain and her other life when she becomes trapped in a past world that she carries with her into her present life with Kevin.

However, being in the past does not give her the option of explaining herself fully either. She acknowledges that she stands outside of the time period to which she continues to return. She thinks, "And I began to realize why Kevin and I had fitted so easily into this time. We weren't really in. We were observers watching a show. We were watching history happen around us. And we were actors" (Butler 98). It becomes clearer and clearer to her that she cannot speak about the present in the past or the past in the present. Although she can temporarily escape from slavery, unlike Sethe, she cannot truly voice herself in either dimension of time. Upon first meeting Tom Weylin, she immediately assumes the role of a slave. At this point in time, she cannot speak as the Dana she is in the present; instead, she immediately assumes an air of inferiority. She notes,

> After a moment, I realized that Weylin was looking at me—staring hard at me. Perhaps he was seeing my resemblance to Alice's mother. He couldn't have seen me clearly enough or long enough at the river to recognize me now as the woman he had once come so near shooting. At first, I stared back. Then, I looked away, remembering that I was supposed to be a slave. Slaves lowered their eyes respectfully. To stare back was insolent. Or at least, that was what my books said. (Butler 66)

When he encounters Dana, Tom, without knowing anything about her, immediately

assumes that she belongs to Kevin and automatically looks upon her as someone beneath him. He commands her attention, saying, "You, girl…What's your name…Where do you come from?" (Butler 67). From the very beginning of their relationship, Tom makes it clear that he is the figure of authority and that he will treat Dana in whatever way he sees fit. Later on in the novel, he thus interprets her ability to read as threatening to his own sense of power. Kevin cautions Dana about behaving more carefully around Tom Weylin, saying, "Weylin doesn't like the way you talk. I don't think he's had much education himself, and he resents you…Weylin was warning me that it was dangerous to keep a slave like you—educated, maybe kidnapped from a free state—as far north as this" (Butler 80). With an education, Dana threatens a system carefully positioned on the belief of white superiority and black inferiority. Tom will not tolerate insurrection, and he later passes on his beliefs to his son and heir of the plantation.

Just as Sethe disrupts a system in which she is supposed to uphold slavery and subject her children to the schoolteacher's aims, so Dana inverts a mindset that sees her as inherently inferior and that wishes to keep her that way. However, like Sethe, Dana cannot escape the system unscathed or unharmed. She talks back to the system of oppression, but it will cost her. Ultimately refusing to accept the position of slave thrust upon her, she resists Rufus's attempt to rape her. Even though she has suffered under his rule, she will not tolerate his sexual possession of her body. When she tries to talk to him, to dissuade him from the unforgiveable action he appears fully ready to commit, Rufus does not listen to her. He takes her hands and pushes her down on a pallet. He exercises force on her body and prevents her from moving. Although a twentieth-

century woman, she assumes the mindset of a slave and begins contemplating what she should do in this situation where Rufus once again assumes physical force over her body. She thinks, "A slave was a slave. Anything could be done to her. And Rufus was Rufus—erratic, alternately generous and vicious. I could accept him as my ancestor, my younger brother, my friend, but not as my master, and not as my lover" (Butler 260). Unable to speak to Rufus, she voices herself in another way. She sinks a knife into his flesh, piercing him in the side and again through his back. She presses the knife deeply into his body, forcing the blade further and further into the depths of his skin. She speaks in death, Rufus's death. However, as he is dying, Rufus grabs onto her arm, never letting go of it. As she begins traveling back to the present, her arm remains in the past as "[s]omething harder and stronger than Rufus's hand clamped down on my arm, squeezing it, stiffening it, pressing into it—painlessly, at first—melting into it, meshing with it as though somehow my arm were being absorbed into something" (Butler 260-1). Dana's resistance comes at the expense of her own body, her own limbs. Breaking free from the system, Sethe surfaces with blood on her hands and a dead body in her arms, and Alice hangs from the ceiling by her neck. Like Sethe and Alice, Dana does escape from a system that oppresses her. There will be blood spilled for her actions. Dana emerges from the past with a missing arm, cut from "the elbow to the ends of the fingers" and forever attached to a wall that people in her current century could not see (Butler 261). Silenced, she wakes up in a hospital bed with the inability to explain her situation to police officials and with a dismembered body permanently marked by slavery. For Sethe, Alice, and Dana, the oppression of slavery charges a high toll on the body, and dismemberment is the ultimate price for escape. All three of these characters

challenge the horrifying institution of slavery, and all three have dismembered bodies as proof of their acts of resistance. A dead baby, a hanged woman, a severed arm—what conditions could be more horrifying? Perhaps, the answer lies in the institution capable of producing these conditions and resulting in the dismemberment of countless, silenced bodies.

Chapter 3: Gender and Sexuality

> Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?
>
> By God, if women hadde writen stories,
>
> As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,
>
> The wolde han written of men moore wikkednesse
>
> Than al the mark of Adam may redresse.[12]

A woman's body appears on the screen. She emerges from the glistening waves that slowly reveal one inch of her orange bikini at a time. First, we see her neck and shoulders, then her breasts, then her torso. Finally, she steps out from the ocean, her body in full view. A male watches her, even using a pair of binoculars to examine each aspect of her physicality from a closer perspective. It is through his binoculars that we as spectators see her body being born from the water that had previously concealed her mysterious existence below its surface. In this scene from *Die Another Day*, a 2002 installment of the James Bond movie franchise, the bikini-clad Jinx, played by Halle Berry, instantly attracts the attention of James Bond, who calls her famous bikini debut a "magnificent view."[13] For many fans of the James Bond series, this scene functions perhaps as just one point of the machismo-sex-guns trifecta glorified by the spy film genre and embedded in the all too familiar Bond plot. For feminist viewers, however, the scene becomes a site in which questions of female objectification and representation converge. Why does the male dismember her body, seeing only one body part at a time?

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[12] Chaucer, Geoffrey. "The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Middle Ages.* Ed. Stephen Greenblatt and M.H. Abrams. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2006. 257-284. Print.

[13] *Die Another Day*. Dir. Lee Tamahori. Perf. Pierce Brosnan, Halle Berry, Rosamund Pike, Toby Stephens, Rick Yune. MGM, 2003. DVD.

Why does Bond watch while Jinx remains the watched? How does society dismember males and females according to their genital parts? In Joanna Russ's landmark novel *The Female Man* (1975), this discussion of gendered dismemberment of the body comes to the forefront of analysis. Taking a quite unconventional approach to a discussion of the gendered body, Russ opens up the body, reveals each inch, each crevice, each part. There are no limits or boundaries, for Russ creates characters who raise voices that do not exactly contribute to a traditional image of a society membered by people who walk in the paths of distinct, divided roles of gender.

Although Russ, who began producing works of science fiction in the late 1960s, writes in a daring, groundbreaking fashion, she is certainly not the first female writer to begin giving a voice to female characters who do not conform to traditional modes of behavior socially and culturally assigned to them and to describe the bodily experience of the female in graphic, bold terms. "Pelvic architecture functional / assailed inside & out / (bring forth) the cunt gets wide / and relatively sloppy"—upon first glance, many readers would not automatically suppose that these lines come from a poem written in the 1950s by a woman, Diane DiPrima (DiPrima 12-14). Instead, the time in which she is writing tends to bring to mind the stereotypical image of a lovely housewife who cleans the house, cooks, takes care of the children, wears a dress, and anticipates her husband's arrival home from work. However, DiPrima's poem "The Practice of Magical Evocation" suggests that there is much more to the experience of being a woman than simply baking a pie and asking, "How was your day, dear?" or wearing an orange bikini for the admiration of James Bond. Female authors like DiPrima and Russ question the very "myth" of their sex (de Beauvoir 1406). Through their writings, these

daring, outspoken female authors capitalize on a spirit of anti-conformity to question social convention and reveal the myths of womanhood perpetuated by popular discourse, and they start with talking about female bodies.

"Myth of Woman"

In order to appreciate fully the work of the authors who discuss the female body in such frank language, it is first important to note the pervasiveness of this "myth of woman" in social discourse "Few myths have been more advantageous to the ruling caste than the myth of woman: it justifies all privileges and even authorizes their abuse" (de Beauvoir 1409)—published in the United States in 1952, Simone de Beauvoir's landmark work, *The Second Sex,* highlights the reality of female existence in the era of World War II and following. Describing the relationships between men and women, de Beauvoir concludes that a patriarchal society has employed a myth of "the feminine 'mystery'" as a means of justifying the status of men as the "self-knowing self" while women, because of the "mystery" of their existence, traditionally tend to occupy the place of the "other" (de Beauvoir 1409). Noting this dichotomy between the "self" and the "other," she says, "Each is *subject* only for himself; each can grasp in immanence only himself, alone: from this point of view the *other* is always a mystery" (de Beauvoir 1409). Reflective of de Beauvoir's theory of "self" and "other," nationalist discourse perpetuated by the American government during World War II employed a version of the "myth of woman" in the propaganda of Rosie the Riveter, a female character who called women to become "part of the assembly line" and "do more than a male will do" (Coster 11). What is interesting about Rosie's message is not that it encouraged women to support the war efforts, but rather that it defined the role of Rosie in male terms.

Designed, created, and illustrated by men, Rosie appeared with her sleeves rolled up and demonstrated a manly look while still wearing makeup and being challenged to work as hard as "a male will do" (Coster 11-12). In addition to Rosie, other forms of propaganda during World War II and following also sought to enlist the service of women while still ensuring that the dichotomy between "self" and "other" remained. For instance, one campaign for the WAVES, a division of the navy for women, encouraged women, "Bring him home sooner…Join the WAVES" (Coster 14). Through using the myths of Rosie the Riveter and the abandoned lover awaiting her man's arrival, national discourse implied that women must volunteer to help men be victorious. The message of these forms of propaganda was always clear: men serve as the main element of the war's defense strategies, and women supplement their efforts. Nevertheless, heeding the call of Rosie, women found themselves working in the public sector during World War II, working in factories, building machines, producing supplies, serving as nurses, and dedicating themselves to a cause outside the home (Stansell 181).

While encouraging women to enter previously male-dominated realms such as the military and the factory, writings and articles at the time simultaneously reminded women that their responsibilities in the workforce were temporary. An article published in 1943 in a pamphlet called "Boy Meets Girl in Wartime" reminded women that in spite of their service in the war they must "avoid arrogance and retain their femininity in the face of their own new status" (Coster 14). Although women had flown planes as WASPs (Women Airforce Service Pilots), served in the navy, helped establish a women's corps in the army, built war equipment, grown "victory gardens," and still

managed to raise children at home (Coster 12-17), they still constituted the "other" sex. Viewed in terms of their place as women instead of as their existence as fellow human beings, women, as the "other" to the existence of men, needed to be doing whatever men were not doing. When men were away from home fighting the war, the women were encouraged to maintain the home. As "home" came to include everything from the garden at home to the factory manufacturing supplies for the men, public discourse in the forms of military campaigns or even Rosie the Riveter encouraged women to assume all responsibilities that the preservation of the warm hearth demanded. However, once men began to return home, popular discourse shifted its focus from pushing women into the workforce to perpetuating the "myth of woman" as the devoted and loving wife who stayed in the home. By the 1950s, the GI Bill and other government efforts to place the men returning from war in the job market resulted in a loss of jobs for women and a general push for women to return to the domestic sphere (Stansell 181-3). Soon, the vision of women as hard workers with their sleeves rolled up shifted into the image of a woman as the queen of her castle with all of the luxuries of modern technology (Stansell 183).

Through mediums such as advertisements, magazines, and even television shows, society encouraged women to be not only content with their return to the home, but also fulfilled in their roles as happy housewives. For example, a *Life* magazine published in the 1950s depicted the message that women needed to move over and let men take the driver's seat. Featuring "one of the most telling photos of the 1950s," this issue of *Life* depicted automobiles that were parked and waiting for commuters after work; the "women who had driven those cars to the station have all moved over to the

passenger seats—so that their men can drive them home" (Greene 4). As advertisements for everything from soap to new dishwashers encouraged women to "shop in stores where…the aisles were overflowing," so magazines included articles about domestic life and things pertaining to the home (Stansell 183). Moreover, shows such as *I Love Lucy* perpetuated female domesticity. In one particular episode called "Equal Rights," Lucy and Ethel bring up the issue of making husbands and wives equal in the households. Echoing the patriarchal voice of America, Ricky responds, "I've had just about enough of this…I am the first one to agree that women should have all the rights they want as long as they stay in their place" ("Equal Rights"). Blaring through televisions across the nation, *I Love Lucy* presented the idea that women's place was in the home while men made a living and worked outside the home.

Even the authors of the Beat Movement, emblems of controversy and resistance, who ushered in the "rebellion against what would soon be termed 'straight society' that would startle America in the following decade" (Greene 3), managed to preserve a myth of women as objects existing to serve the purpose of male desire. In his 1957 novel *On the Road*, Jack Kerouac portrays women as mere accessories to Sal and Dean's adventures while traveling the road of life together. In the novel, Sal and Dean meet each other as their relationships with women are disintegrating. Upon first encountering Dean, Sal has just "split up" with his wife, and Dean is having problems in his relationship with Marylou (Kerouac, *On the Road* 1-2). Besides describing her hair as "pretty blonde," Sal does not have anything else positive to say about Marylou. He describes her as "awfully dumb and capable of doing horrible things" (Kerouac, *On the Road* 2). Moreover, he and Dean characterize her as a "whore" for leaving Dean and

going back to Denver (Kerouac, *On the Road* 3). Nevertheless, up until she leaves, Dean dominates Marylou. Sal says, "Dean got up nervously, paced around, thinking, and decided the thing to do was to have Marylou make breakfast and sweep the floor" (Kerouac, *On the Road* 3). In other words, the thing to do is to give Marylou something to do. As the novel progresses, women become more and more like pit stops along the road for Sal and Dean. For example, Babe and Betty are significant to Sal's narrative in that they "cooked up a snack of beans and franks" for one of their big parties (Kerouac, *On the Road* 53). Rita becomes merely an engagement that Dean "has…lined up" for Sal's enjoyment in San Francisco (Kerouac, *On the Road* 57). Moreover, Sal describes "beautiful women standing in white doorways, waiting for their men" (Kerouac, *On the Road* 78). Near the end of the novel, Dean, Sal, and Stan go to a brothel where they all have sex with numerous women. Recounting the experience, Sal says, "Still we couldn't sober up and didn't want to leave, and though we were all run out we still wanted to hang around with our lovely girls in this strange Arabian paradise we had finally found at the end of the hard, hard road" (Kerouac, *On the Road* 289). By calling it the "Arabian paradise" at the "end of the hard, hard road," Sal suggests that the good time they had with the whores was a culmination of their journey. Starting their journey after leaving women, they likewise reach the high point of their trip by conquering women. In *On the Road*, the women have little to do with the road; instead, they are housekeepers or whores.

Similarly, in *Dharma Bums* (1958), Jack Kerouac's semi-autobiographical novel about his adventures with Gary Snyder, the female characters again support the stereotypes of women rooted in American ideology. For example, Ray, the narrator,

describes Christine in terms of her role as a mother. He says, "Christine came up with both children in her arms, she was a good strong girl and could climb hills with great burdens" (Kerouac, *Dharma Bums* 214). Pictured with her children, Christine fulfils the "myth of woman" as nothing more than a mother. However, like *On the Road*, *Dharma Bums* also posits women as sexual objects. For example, Psyche, one of Japhy Ryder's lovers, consents to have sex with him before he leaves for Japan. After sleeping with her, he "threw her clean off the boat" at her insistence that she go to Japan with him (Kerouac, *Dharma Bums* 215). Although Kerouac did base much of his writing on real people and experiences he encountered with his Beat colleagues and very well may have grounded his female characters in the images of real women he had observed, he did not present the women's point of view. Depicting the women through the eyes of the men, Kerouac created female characters with one-dimensional personalities. On the other hand, Beat poets such as Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder depicted women in a grotesque, monstrous light. In "Kaddish," a poem dedicated to his mother, Allen Ginsberg describes her female sexuality in grotesque terms, dismembering this woman into undesirable parts. Though depicting the madness that plagued his mother, Ginsberg demonizes his mother's sexuality by calling her the "Monster of the Beginning Womb" and detailing the "dress up round her hips, big slash of hair, scars of operations, pancreas, belly wounds, abortions, appendix, stitching of incisions pulling down in the fat like hideous thick zippers—ragged long lips between her legs" (Ginsberg 89). According to his description, female sexuality appears almost as a disease. Similarly, Gary Snyder's poem "Praise for Sick Women" compares menstruation to an actual sickness or illness. The speaker in the poem says, "All women are wounded / Who

gather berries, dibble in mottle light… / Whose sick eye bleeds the land" (Snyder 23-31). By associating a natural occurrence of the female body with the idea of sickness or abnormality, Snyder's speaker effectively makes woman seem the unhealthy "other" to a "well" male body that does not exhibit "blood dripping through crusted thighs" (Snyder 52).

As female authors emerging from this collection of fragmented images faced a strong public discourse firmly establishing the role of women as domestic guardians who raised their children, served their husbands, and worked in the home; found themselves depicted in the literature of the day as housekeepers, mothers, or sexual objects; and encountered the horrifying literary representation of their reproductive organs and anatomy as monstrosities, it is little wonder then that female writers coming out of this tradition set out to tell their side of the story and to dismember the social myths that would seek to entrap them within the limiting constructs of the "other," as defined in de Beauvoir's theoretical context. Interestingly, it was not through a defense of their position as "other" that female authors made a name for themselves. Instead, by assuming control over the voice of the "self," female authors pierced the discourse fueling "the myth of woman" through making a statement that women, though bearing the label of the "other," were capable of the same standards of the "self." Since the "self" constituted men in the "myth of woman," and men embodied the standard to which society assigned its point of relativity, determined female writers turned their attention to writing like men in order to establish themselves as credible authors. Echoing Lucy's response to Ricky's discourse on equal rights, "We want to be treated exactly as if we were men" ("Equal Rights"), authors like DiPrima and Russ set out to

do just that: speak like men through open, engaging discussions of the "self."

Feminist Beat writers first began challenging popular discourse of the role of women by adopting the styles and methods of the "best minds" of the Beat Generation. For example, Diane DiPrima, perhaps the most well-known female writer to emerge from the Beat tradition, began writing poetry in the 1950s in the vein of the anti-conformity and rebellion to social convention that characterized what it meant to be "Beat." Born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1934, DiPrima became friends with Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and other Beats while living in Manhattan. Influenced by the ideas and beliefs supporting the Beat Movement, DiPrima published her first collection of poems in 1958, *This Kind of Bird Flies Backwards*. Like the works of the poets Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder, her poems ooze with a sense of social rebellion and resentment to a culture that would tell her what her place in the world was. In the opening lines of "The Practice of Magical Evocation," the speaker declares, "i am a woman and my poems / are woman's" (DiPrima 1-2). Speaking of her experience as a woman, DiPrima said in an interview, "I wanted to have every experience I could have, I wanted everything that was possible to a person in a female body" ("Diane DiPrima"). Though recognizing the social limitations of her "female body," DiPrima wrote poems that exemplify the same feeling of assertion and independence that made the works of Ginsberg and Snyder so powerful in their time and so lasting in American literature even after the Beat movement began to lose its prominence. For example, forming her poem "The Practice of Magical Evocation" as a response to Gary Snyder's "Praise for Sick Women," DiPrima showed her ability to be as direct in her imagery about the female sex as Gary Snyder could be, to dismember the female body into its genitalia.

Just as Snyder says of the vagina, "Hair grows, tongue tenses out" (Snyder 15), and then describes the "blood dripping through crusted thighs" as indicators of menstruation (Snyder 52), so DiPrima shows no timidity in talking about the female body in explicit terms. Elaborating on how the "cunt gets wide and relatively sloppy" (DiPrima 14-15) and serves as a "veil thru which the fingering Will" penetrates (DiPrima 20), DiPrima evidences a much different kind of woman from a Lucy who says, "Yes, sir," or a housewife who reads up on the latest way to wash clothes. Rather, the speaker in the poem blushes at nothing regarding her own sexuality. Like Ginsberg, who openly talked about "alcohol and cock and endless balls" (Ginsberg 22-23) and "pubic beards" (Ginsberg 18) in his 1955 poem "Howl," so DiPrima explored sexuality to its fullest extent. Instead of allowing female anatomy to remain part of the "mystery" surrounding the "myth of woman" that de Beauvoir identified in *The Second Sex*, DiPrima at least through the written word showed that women could be open about their sexuality in their writings, just as men could. Fragmenting a discourse that would posit women as beacons of virtue in the home, DiPrima revealed that women did not have to remain the "other" regarding sexual openness and experience.

In later years, women coming out of the Beat tradition were able to accomplish through memoirs what DiPrima initiated in poetry: the establishment of a female voice unafraid to speak out about her own experiences. Carolyn Cassady, the wife of Neal Cassady and mistress of Jack Kerouac, compiled her experiences as a woman in a memoir called *Off the Road: My Years with Cassady, Kerouac, and Ginsberg* (1990). A first-hand witness to the writing styles, personalities, and behaviors of the Beats, Carolyn Cassady not only provides information about the writers, but also details her

own experiences of maintaining a home with Neal while Jack lived with them. In the memoir, she remembers a warning that her husband Neal had given her and Jack before leaving on a two-week trip for work. He had said, "I don't know about leaving you two—you know what they say, 'My best pal and my best gal…just don't do anything *I* wouldn't do" (Cassady 451). Carolyn recalls being frustrated and embarrassed by his statement since "there was nothing he wouldn't do in a similar situation" (Cassady 451).

By suggesting that he set the standard for behavior, Neal Cassady had implied that his actions should indicate the bar by which his wife's actions should be measured. However, Carolyn Cassady's reaction to his presumption that his wife would need to behave according to the guidelines he had ironically set forth before leaving the house indicated that not all women in America felt the compulsion to obey their husbands in all respects and let them drive the cars. She remembers thinking, "The more I thought about Neal's remark, the angrier I got and the more it hurt. Well, maybe I was jumping to conclusions again—maybe he really did mean it only as a joke. But it was no joke to me" (Cassady 452). Demonstrating a resistance to be bound to her husband's standard of measurement, Carolyn Cassady decided to do what she knew her husband would have done in the same situation. Like DiPrima, who responded to men's comments about the female sex by talking about the female sex herself, so Carolyn reacted to her husband's fear that she would do something he would do by doing the very thing he feared: assuming his role as "self" of the household. Ironically, the kitchen, a symbol of female domesticity and loyalty, becomes the site for her affair with Jack Kerouac. Planning her affair with Jack, she made a pizza and set up her quarters for the launch of her scheme: "new candle in the bottle, table set as usual, radio set at KJAZ, the station

both Neal and Jack approved of for its ballads and progressive jazz" (Cassady 453). After the affair, Carolyn recalls feeling that she finally became part of their circle. In other words, by acting as her husband would act, Carolyn succeeded in becoming a "self," rather than an "other," in the camaraderie between Neal and Jack, both males. She says, "Now, I was a part of all they did…I was now a real contributor for once; my housework and childcare had a purpose that was needed and appreciated. I was functioning as a female and my men were supportive" (Cassady 456). Though occupying a female body, Carolyn found support from Neal and Jack because she had stepped outside the realm of her sphere as the "other," the one who would of course not behave as the "self" would. Moreover, Carolyn's decision to act as her husband would not only resulted in her new position as a fellow human being, to whom Neal and Jack would "address remarks" now about their writings or other issues, but also in the men's literal and figurative willingness to join her "downstairs in the kitchen" (Cassady 456). Whereas DiPrima used language to shatter the "myth of woman," so Carolyn Cassady had used her "place" in the kitchen to her own advantage.

As the "other," the Beat women writers first had to prove that the mysterious "other" had a voice. Humanizing the faceless women found in the standard Beat works by men of the day, Diane DiPrima evidenced that there are in fact two sides to every story. Whereas Snyder had portrayed women as merely "fertile" and "wounded" because of a flaw in their biological makeup, DiPrima resounded with a female perspective that examined female biology from a female's vantage point. Similarly, Carolyn Cassady's memoir *Off the Road* became a voice for the women who had never been on the road in the writings of Jack Kerouac about his travels with Neal Cassady.

Unlike the female characters in *On the Road* who served as vessels of sexual pleasure for the men, Carolyn serves as a real woman with real feelings who manages to make the men her own sources of sexual pleasure. By using the very language and sexual power that the male authors of the Beat Generation had used to maintain a distinction between the "self" of the "best minds" of the generation and the "other" of those females who had a "difficult dance to do, but not in mind," the women emerging from the Beat Movement used their writings to subvert the traditional rhetoric perpetuated by a patriarchal society in the America of their times and to pose the question: why should the "other" remain the "other" if she is capable of doing the same thing as the "self?"

Like DiPrima and Cassady, Russ also establishes the female body, female sexuality, as the starting place for a discussion of socially constructed gender in *The Female Man*. "I suppose they decided that my tits were not of the best kind, or not real, or that they were someone else's (my twin sister's), so they split me from the neck up; as I said, it demands a certain disembodiment…I'm not a woman; I'm a man. I'm a man with a woman's face. I'm a woman with a man's mind"— so the character Joanna vents in *The Female Man*, Joanna Russ's provocative novel of science fiction, published in 1975 (Russ 133). Joanna feels dismembered by a society associating her breasts with the female gender and her mind with the male gender, echoing the frustrations experienced by women like DiPrima and Cassady. Dismemberment of the body separates the female body into a neck, face, and breasts, just like Jinx in a movie focused on Bond. Set in a 1970s American context where men and women have varying relationships based on the planet they inhabit, *The Female Man* pushes the boundaries of traditionalism and conventionalism even further than DiPrima's poetry. Russ creates

multiple worlds and characters who speak back to male structures, but she also eliminates the need for men in every aspect of life. In one world, Whileaway, Russ depicts an all-female society capable of reproduction, marriage, and familial social constructs completely void of men, exterminated by a plague. In another world. Manland and Womanland are at war, and female warriors fight against Manlanders for resources. A third world imagines a society where World War II did not occur and the Great Depression still lingers on in society. Finally, there is a world most like Earth, where a lesbian seeks acceptance and Joanna laments male objectification and visual dismemberment of her body. Joanna recognizes that the possession of breasts indicates the body of a woman, but having "my Ph.D. and my professorship and my tennis medal and my engineer's contract" reveals the ambition of a man (Russ 133). Throughout Russ's work, women from diverse backgrounds struggle with this dismemberment of the body that dictates one's gender on the basis of one's physical organs. For instance, Janet, a character hailing from Whileaway, a planet with no men, confronts a multitude of gender assumptions when she arrives on Earth. A television host asks her, "Don't you want men to return to Whileaway…One sex is half a species…Do you want to banish sex from Whileaway?" (Russ 10). Confused by the assertion that sex is confined to relationships between men and women only, she retorts, "I'm married. I have two children. What the devil do you mean?" (Russ 10). For Janet, marriage, sex, and reproduction are concepts that do not involve men in any way.

On the other hand, Jeannine, a woman from the earth unfamiliar with World War II, finds herself unhappy with the gender expectations set before her. Not only does she think Cal, her love interest, is failing to meet the expectations of being a man since

"he likes to get *dressed up*" in drapes and necklaces (Russ 85), but she also considers her own role in this heterosexual relationship, equating the relationship with her womanhood, saying, "Cal—*Cal* is—*well*! Still. Cal is sweet. Poor, but sweet. I wouldn't give up Cal for anything" (Russ 86). Moreover, unlike Joanna, Jeannine clings to her interpretation of femininity, even if that interpretation involves a relationship with Cal, whom she suspects of being a transvestite because of his "wrong" behavior (Russ 85). In response to the question, "Has anyone proposed the choice to you lately [between being a man or woman]," Jeannine resoundingly answers, "I enjoy being a girl, don't you? I wouldn't be a man for anything; I think they have such a hard time of it. I like being admired. I like being a girl. I wouldn't be a man for anything. Not for *anything*…I won't be a man" (Russ 86). Then, there is Laura, who proclaims, "I'm a victim of penis envy…so I can't ever be happy or lead a normal life. My mother worked as a librarian when I was little and that's not feminine. She thinks it's deformed me" (Russ 65). Laura seeks happiness and love in a relationship with Janet, who introduces her to an orgasm. Wishing for male empowerment, Laura wants to see herself as Genghis Khan (Russ 60). Neither Jeannine nor Laura finds happiness in social expectations of heterosexuality, but these women feel trapped within a system that clearly delineates gender along the lines of genital members.

Finally, Jael, who appears later on in the book, reveals herself to be an assassin who quite literally does not tolerate male appropriation of her body. In her world, Manland and Womanland remain at war with each other. A real-man on Manland begins negotiating with Jael about the war but ends his conversation by telling her, "You're a woman…You've got a hole down there…You've got real, round tits and

you've got a beautiful ass…you're waiting for a man, waiting for me to stick it in" (Russ 181). To this vivid articulation of her body parts, Jael responds by killing him violently, pulling his skin, digging her nails "into his neck," and finally scoring "him under the ear, letting him spray urgently into the rug" (Russ 182). While these characters handle the expectations of gender and sexuality in many different ways, they nevertheless all face the equation of gender with physical sex and challenge the marking of genitalia as sole indicator of gender roles. By defying traditional expectations of the body, Russ's characters not only question the dismemberment of their bodies, but also use that dismemberment to speak out against discrimination embedded in strict ideas of genital organs, imprinting their voices on the bodies of their enemies: male appropriators of the female body. On the various planets these characters occupy, discussions of gender and sexuality are worthy causes for violence, contention, shame, and even dismembering solutions with fatal consequences. For Russ, it is not just a matter of talking about the body like DiPrima does; rather, it is a matter of doing something with that body.

On our planet, gender and sexuality often become discussions of concepts amounting to the difference between marking the letter *M* or *F* on an application or locating the bathroom door with a stick figure wearing a skirt. What these definitions share is a seemingly comprehensive summation of gender and sexuality as terms indicating the bifurcation of sex into two neat and precise categories: male and female. Even in today's society, the categories of male and female continue to pervade all aspects of social and cultural exchange, leaving inhabitants of the twenty-first century with gender-reveal parties for babies, language based on gendered pronouns, and

complete shock at Target's attempt to reorganize toy aisles for children and remove signs indicating recommendations based on gender. However, when looking at the roles of gender in society, the neatly divided categories of sex and gender become less clear in terms of their realistic application to the division between the sexes. While a definition of gender and sexuality might provide insight into marking a bubble labeled *male* or *female* on a document, it does not resolve the questions that demand a more informed definition of gender and sexuality, such as the question of how transgender individuals should respond to gendered classifications in social situations or why girls are supposed to like Disney princesses while boys should prefer male role models. A definition of gender and sex that rests on the division of that which is male and that which is female proves insufficient to address what gender and sexuality are adequately, for the male and female distinctions used to bolster a definition of gender are disputed quantities in and of themselves.

Nevertheless, such dispute often succumbs to labeling members of the body, or, more specifically, dividing female from male. These labeled members often lay the foundation for the categories that continue to structure the organization of gender and sexuality into two separate columns, an organization Adrienne Rich in her essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience" (1980) criticizes for its inherent dependence on "compulsory heterosexuality," for its commitment to preserving heterosexual relationships between men and women and defining roles that place people into these two clearly defined roles (Rich 1762). Identifying women as "the emotional and sexual property of men" (Rich 1763), Rich examines how heterosexuality, through political, religious, and cultural means, has managed to function "as a political

institution which disempowers women" and continues to keep a heterosexual hierarchy entrenched in society with the male body positioned at the top tier (Rich 1764). Dissatisfied with a definition of gender and sexuality that stems from an assumption that the world is divided into what is male and female, Rich exposes the privileging of heterosexuality within the very distinction of male and female as categories of differentiation. Like Rich, Judith Butler disputes the traditional view of gender as the means by which we determine who is male and who is female. Citing the example of drag, Butler posits the theory that gender and sexuality are a performance of what society has stipulated to be male or female behavior. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler hypothesizes that gender and sexuality describe performative acts of prescribed sexual formulas, using the example of drag as the process of mimicry one undergoes in assuming the performance of gender. While her point lies not in the understanding of drag, drag nevertheless reveals how gender can serve as a performance. Regardless of one's genital members, the individual still *assumes* the appearance and mannerisms culturally associated with a particular sex; the genital members do not inherently possess a code for behavior. Rather, social and cultural constructs utilize the members as a basis for determining which code of behavior one may assume. Therefore, in Butler's hypothesis, gender and sexuality do not merely represent sexual differences between male and female. Instead, they become sources of power through which a heterosexual society maintains its grasp. Through this construction, the "foundational categories of sex, gender, and desire [serve] as effects of a specific formation of power," not as absolutes in and of themselves. Questioning the "naturalness of 'sex,'" Butler privileges the aspect of power in relationship to gender over any innate definition

of sexual nature, seeing the body as "the surface and scene of a cultural inscription" on which social theories converge (Butler 165). Butler's hypothesis considers that "genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity" (Butler 174).

Although gender is "neither true nor false," it remains enforced by heterosexual social systems that view deviations from the organ-based classification model as abnormal. As Rich suggests, one example is homosexuality and the responses to it. She observes that the "lesbian experience is perceived on a scale ranging from deviant to abhorrent or simply rendered invisible" (Rich 1764). Moreover, Butler also recognizes the association between homosexuality and deviance and argues that melancholia, enforced through psychoanalytical systems of prohibition, acts as a security system to ensure the preservation of culturally constructed gender roles that conform to heterosexual expectations, relating her theory of the "melancholia of gender" to Freud's definition of the same term (Butler 57). Differentiating melancholia from mourning, a case in which "the loved object no longer exists" ("Mourning and Melancholia," 14: 244), Freud says of the former:

> Let us now apply to melancholia what we have learnt about mourning. In one set of cases it is evident that melancholia too may be the reaction to the loss of a loved object. Where the exciting causes are different one can recognize that there is a loss of a more ideal kind. The object has not perhaps actually died, but has been lost as an object of love (e.g. in the case of a betrothed girl who has been jilted). ("Mourning and Melancholia," 14: 245)

Melancholia manifests itself in more instances than just the experience of a lost object. Unlike mourning, which results in the "loss in regard to an object," melancholia has a much more drastic effect on the melancholic, who experiences a "loss in regard to his ego" ("Mourning and Melancholia," 14: 247). In order to cope with the loss of the object, the bereaved melancholic incorporates that object as an identification into the ego so that the object is no longer lost but preserved within the ego of the melancholic. Freud says, "In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification" ("Mourning and Melancholia," 14: 249).

Ultimately, at stake is the identification of the self, a word that Freud uses as a synonym for the ego in *Civilization and Its Discontents* when he says, "Normally, there is nothing of which we are more certain than the feeling of our self, of our own ego" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 21: 65). Freud maintains that the melancholic person, having identified with the object of loss, will often expose his or her own inadequacies and locate "satisfaction in self-exposure" ("Mourning and Melancholia," 14: 247). Unlike mourning, in which "it is the world which has become poor and empty," melancholia interprets this image as reflective not of the world, but of "the ego itself" ("Mourning and Melancholia," 14: 246). Describing the extreme extent to which the melancholic can lose the ego, Freud posits that the depletion of the ego can be extensive enough to result in suicide if the ego begins to look upon itself as the object. Although he acknowledges that suicide has long been a mystery because the "ego's self-love" would presumably forbid self-destruction, he nevertheless maintains, "The analysis of

melancholia now shows that the ego can kill itself only if, owing to the return of the object-cathexis, it can treat itself as an object" ("Mourning and Melancholia," 14: 252). By associating itself with the object, the ego, having identified itself with the lost object, no longer operates under an identification with "self," but rather under an identification that recognizes the object as the self; thus, one of the symptoms of melancholia that Freud outlines is "an extraordinary diminution in…self-regard" ("Mourning and Melancholia," 14: 246).

Extending the consequences of melancholia to more than just the loss of an object, Butler sees melancholia as a system upholding culturally constructed gender roles. Focusing on the process of identification undergone by the self as the self absorbs the object, Butler questions this process of identification explicated by Freud. She posits,

> Because identifications substitute for object relations, and identifications are the consequence of loss, gender identification is a kind of melancholia in which the sex of the prohibited object is internalized as a prohibition. This prohibition sanctions and regulates discrete gendered identity and the law of heterosexual desire. The resolution of the Oedipal complex affects gender identification through not only the incest taboo, but, prior to that, the taboo against homosexuality. (Butler 80)

According to Butler's view of melancholia, this prohibition manifests itself in the "hostility which relates to an object and which represents the ego's original reaction to objects in the external world" ("Mourning and Melancholia" 14: 252). For male children, Freud assumes that the castration complex functions to produce the child's

identifications with the parent of the opposite sex, calling the male's identification with his father the "more normal" of the two possible identifications and reflective of the consolidation of "masculinity in a boy's character" (*The Ego and the Id,* 19: 32). To the female child, Freud attributes two desires, one for the penis and one for a child. He argues, "So far there has been no question of the Oedipus complex, nor has it up to this point played any part. But now the girl's libido slips into a new position along the line—there is no other way of putting it—of the equation 'penis-child'" ("Anatomical Sex-Distinction," 19: 256).

Freud not only draws a connection between the woman's supposed inferiority and her role as child-bearer instead of penis-bearer, but also uses this connection then to justify woman's natural place as mother. He says, "The two wishes—to possess a penis and a child—remain strongly cathected in the unconscious and help prepare the female creature for her later sexual role" ("Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex," 19: 179). Describing female children's process of identification, Freud says that "the outcome of the Oedipus attitude in a little girl may be an intensification of her identification with her mother…a result which will fix the child's feminine character" (*The Ego and the Id*, 19: 32). Acknowledging the possibility of a female's identification with the father, Freud says,

> Analysis very often shows that a little girl, after she has had to relinquish her father as a love-object, will bring her masculinity into prominence and identify herself with her father (that is, the object which has been lost), instead of with her mother. This will clearly depend on whether the masculinity in her disposition—whatever that may consist in—is strong

> enough. (*The Ego and the Id*, 19: 32)

Although Butler notes that "Freud avows his confusion about what precisely a masculine or feminine disposition is," she also exposes how his assumptions regarding identifications are problematic in that they assume that adopting an identification contrary to that of the parent of the opposite sex is a negative, abnormal occurrence and that these identifications are somehow already inherently masculine or feminine (Butler 77-8). For Butler, Freud's description of the "character" of the child becomes synonymous with "the acquisition of gender identity" since that developing "character" must assume either a feminized or masculinized position (Butler 74). For Freud, being masculine assumes a male identification based on the figure of the father, while the feminine state involves penis envy and an inclination towards being a biological mother.

In addition to criticizing Freud's delegation of these identifications to the categories of male and female, Butler acknowledges the problem of heterosexual mandates that conflate identification with prohibition. She argues,

> The result is that one identifies with the same-sexed object of love, thereby internalizing both the aim and object of homosexual cathexis. The identifications consequent to melancholia are modes of preserving unresolved object relations, and in the case of same-sexed gender identification, the unresolved object relations are invariably homosexual. Indeed, the stricter and more stable the gender affinity, the less resolved the original loss, so that rigid gender boundaries inevitably work to conceal the loss of an original love that, unacknowledged, fails to be

> resolved. (Butler 81)

Far from being a deviation, homosexuality, at least according to Butler, represents a relationship with a love object that is actually more resolved than a heterosexual relationship. Whereas Rich criticizes the pervasiveness of heterosexual systems, Butler identifies psychological inconsistencies with psychoanalytical theories suggesting the naturalness of heterosexual love. Looking at heterosexual love as the complete embodiment of a prohibition, she asserts,

> If feminine and masculine dispositions are the result of the effective internalization of that taboo, and if the melancholic answer to the loss of the same-sexed object is to incorporate and, indeed, to become that object…then gender identity appears primarily to be the internalization of a prohibition that proves to be formative of identity. (Butler 81)

Exposing the unnaturalness of gender formation, Butler suggests that the alternatives to heterosexuality feared and deemed as abnormalities are quite possibly more natural inclinations, inclinations which demand fixed systems of prohibition to subdue them and uphold the heterosexual model. This heterosexual model rooted in the primacy of the phallus accomplishes a dismembering task regarding female development: making the female body responsible for both absence and loss.

In *The Female Man*, melancholic tendencies regarding questions of identity become apparent as some of the characters wrestle with acquiring these "feminine and masculine dispositions" associated with the establishment of the prohibition and loss of the love object, which, according to Butler, "fails to be resolved." For instance, Jeannine awakens from a dream about the planet of Whileaway, a planet home to

women only. This dream makes her feel some kind of loss, for even the "bed is full of dreamy, suspicious hollows" (Russ 105). Upon getting ready to go to her brother's house, she contemplates the dream. "Everything suggests to Jeannine something she has lost, although she doesn't put it to herself this way; what she understands is that everything in the world wears a faint coating of nostalgia, makes her cry, seems to say to her, 'You can't'"—so the narrator describes Jeannine's reactions to the dream (Russ 105). For Butler, Jeannine's loss may very well represent an unresolved love for an object prohibited. It is interesting to note that, in order to distance herself from the thought of loss, to "get away from the dream that still lingers in the folds of her bedclothes, in the summery smell of her soft old sheets, a smell of herself that Jeannine likes but wouldn't admit to anybody," she begins reiterating to herself prohibitions against her thoughts and dreams (Russ 105). Most of these halts against the dreaming refer to household duties as she remembers that she must wash clothes, take out the garbage, do the dishes, clean the toilet, and make lunch (Russ 105-106). Moreover, at the point that she considers not performing one of these wifely functions, the thought of Cal, her love interest, steers her back on course. For example, she "decides to go get the sewing box to do his clothes, then changes her mind. Instead, she picks up the murder mystery. *Cal will say, 'You didn't sew my clothes.'* She goes to get the sewing box out of the back of the closet" (Russ 107). Because Cal would not approve of her failure to perform her assigned gender role as angel of the home, Jeannine replaces the book with the chores she must do. Even though she dreams of life in another universe, she accepts a "feminine" identification with her mother. She "is going to put on her Mommy's shoes. That caretaker of childhood and feminine companion of men is waiting for her at

the end of the road we all must travel" (Russ 119).

On the other hand, Laura, hailing from Anytown, U.S.A., finds herself torn between accepting "feminine qualities" and pursuing those "masculine" ambitions Joanna herself achieves. Laura thinks, "*Everyone knows* that much as women want to be scientists and engineers, they want foremost to be womanly companions to men…and caretakers of childhood; *everyone knows* that a large part of a woman's identity inheres in the style of her attractiveness" (Russ 60). In the same way that Joanna laments the inability of her accomplishments to remove the sandwich board announcing "LOOK! I HAVE TITS!" to male colleagues who refuse to take her seriously in the professional world (Russ 133), so Laura questions the compatibility of one cultural construct prompting the female to be a wife and mother and another inspiring the male to achieve career goals. Through much reading and research, she decides that women are capable of both; she "learned, wearing her rimless glasses, that the world is full of intelligent, attractive, talented women who manage to combine careers with their primary responsibilities as wives and mothers and whose husbands beat them" (Russ 60). Nevertheless, while reasoning these two categories in her mind, attempting to meld them together, Laura asks: "what?" (Russ 60). *What* is this assumption that women want to be wives and mothers more than they want to be professionals? *What* is this belief system that promotes wifedom in spite of physical abuse? She wears a "too-big man's shirt they can't ever get her out of, no matter what they do, and her ancient, shape-less jeans" (Russ 60). *What* is this dismemberment of her identity that she must accept? Her hesitation to conform to the supposed manifestations of femininity encounters a barrage of prohibitions of self, body, and identity. Her mother insists that

"being a girl is wonderful. Why? Because you can wear pretty clothes and you don't have to do anything; the men will do it for you" (Russ 65). Not understanding her dissatisfaction with the gender roles she must develop, her father wonders, "What the hell is she fussing about this time?" (Russ 66). However, her parents are not the only voices of prohibition. From her uncle, she learns that the woman is to submit to the affections of a man; from songs, she hears that the woman lives to please the man at all costs (Russ 66). The prohibitions of society proclaim, "of course you're brilliant. They say: of course you'll get a Ph.D. and then sacrifice it to have babies. They say: if you don't, you're the one who'll have two jobs and you can make a go of it if you're exceptional, which very few women are, *and if you find a very understanding man*" (Russ 66).

Finally, she prohibits herself, reprimanding herself for even considering sexual relations with a female. After all, she "loves her father" (Russ 60). Censoring her own thoughts, she tells herself,

> I've never slept with a girl. I couldn't. I wouldn't want to. That's abnormal and I'm not, although you can't be normal unless you do what you want and you can't be normal unless you love men. To do what I wanted would be normal, unless what I wanted was abnormal, in which case it would be abnormal to please myself and normal to do what I didn't what to do, which is normal. So you see. (Russ 68)

So we see the battle between normal and abnormal, submitting to "compulsory heterosexuality" or embracing a love object of one's choice. Embodying prohibition itself as she navigates through these prohibitions against what is un-feminine or un-

masculine, Laura begins to feel that she is losing herself. Indeed, the "melancholia of gender" affects her ego, her own self; she "[s]ays over and over to herself Non Sum, Non Sum which means either *I don't exist* or *I'm not that*" (Russ 59). Facing the melancholia that prohibits desire and enforces an unnatural division of gender identification, Laura becomes fragmented. She becomes a fragmented image of a body. She cannot identify with women like her mother who glorify the work of a wife and mother; however, she does not want to identify with men, or her father, for she proclaims, "I'm a Man-Hating Woman" (Russ 67). Unlike Jeannine, who proclaims that she "like[s] being admired" (Russ 86), Laura feels her insides being ripped open upon hearing comments regarding her appearance. When a boy tells her, "You're so beautiful when you're angry," she thinks to herself, "My guts on the floor, you're so beautiful when you're angry. *I want to be recognized*" (Russ 68). She emotionally feels a certain sense of her own disembowelment as her "guts" spill onto the floor at the thought that only her appearance matters, that someone finds her beautiful, not smart or important. Comments about her appearance only emphasize the invisibility she already feels. Fragmented into pieces of gender expectations, prohibition, and physical externality, Laura unsurprisingly expresses: "*I don't exist*" (Russ 59).

Another character who feels as if she is a fragmented being without form, without being, is Joanna. Joanna traces the internalization of prohibition to the lost love object of a father. Reflecting on her childhood, she says, "I had a five-year-old self who said: *Daddy won't love you*" (Russ 135). As Butler indicates, prohibition may result from the lost love of the parent in the oedipal stage. Butler argues, "The internalization of the parent as object of love suffers a necessary inversion of meaning. The parent is

not only prohibited as an object of love, but is internalized as a *prohibiting* or withholding object of love" (Butler 80). Joanna connects this feeling of rejection from her father to other self-policing thought patterns of prohibition, such as "I had a ten-year-old self who said: *the boys won't play with you*. I had a fifteen-year-old self who said: *nobody will marry you*. I had a twenty-year-old self who said: *you can't be fulfilled without a child*" (Russ 135). This prohibited sense of loss operates for Joanna much in the same way that it functions for Laura: it chips away at the self. One by one, these prohibitive forms that cause Joanna to perceive herself as a walking prohibition tear away at her sense of self, or her sense of being, affecting her view of who she is and who she is not. Echoing Freud's assertion that melancholia can induce a tremendous lack of "self-regard" ("Mourning and Melancholia," 14: 246), Joanna characterizes her attitude towards herself as "self-hate" (Russ 135).

For example, describing her writing, she says, "I have no structure (she thought), my thoughts seep out shapelessly like menstrual fluid" (Russ 137). Dismembering her writing into "and's" and "run-on sentences," she criticizes her "feminine" use of words (Russ 137). She attacks her own body parts, saying, "Very swampy in my mind. Very rotten and badly off. I am a woman. I am a woman with a woman's brain. I am a woman with a woman's sickness. I am a woman with the wraps off, bald as an adder" (Russ 137). In addition to feeling reduced to "tits" by men, Joanna considers the appearance of women to be monstrous and ultimately headed for complete invisibility. She asserts,

> I knew beyond the shadow of a hope that to be female is to be mirror and honeypot, servant and judge, the terrible Rhadamanthus…the vagina

> dentata…This is until you're forty-five, ladies, after which you vanish into thin air like the smile of a Cheshire cat, leaving behind only a disgusting grossness and a subtle poison that automatically infects every man under twenty-one (Russ 134).

Besides generalizing the experience for women who disappear into the male oblivion of bodily perception, Joanna also personalizes this experience, breaking her body into undesirable components, enumerating a list of "my matted hair, my filthy skin, my big flat plaques of green bloody teeth" (Russ 135). Like Ginsberg who terms his mother the "Monster of the Beginning Womb" with "the fat like hideous thick zippers—ragged long lips between her legs" (Ginsberg 89), Joanna also sees herself as doomed to be this image of the frightening, castrating, threatening "vagina dentata."

Might of Woman

For Jeannine, Laura, and Joanna, the ego, or the self, shatters into pieces as a result of the "melancholia of gender," the pervading mass of inculcated prohibitions that should somehow crystallize into the perfected state of heterosexual desire. However, the novel provides us with two powerful forces who counteract the startling dismemberment of the self. In the midst of severed selves, Janet and Jael emerge to reassemble the shards. After all, upon finding Janet, Joanna, and Jeannine, Jael then proclaims to the group of women, "It came to me several months ago that I might find my other *selves* [emphasis mine] out there in the great, gray, might-have-been, so I undertook—for reasons partly personal and partly political, of which more later—to get hold of the three of you. It was very hard work" (Russ 160). These women invert psychoanalytical systems privileging the signifying presence of the phallus. Rejecting

the idea that they are inferior to men or ridden with envy for the penis, Janet and Jael redirect the center of these systems from one of female inferiority to one of male dependence on the female body for meaning. Within phallocentric discourses, Butler identifies two possible positions: that of symbolically representing the phallus or physically possessing the phallus. She says:

> "Being" the Phallus and "having" the Phallus denote divergent sexual positions, or nonpositions (impossible positions, really), within language. To "be" the Phallus is to be the "signifier" of the desire of the Other and *to appear* as this signifier. In other words, it is to be the Object, the Other of a (heterosexualized) masculine desire, but also to represent or reflect that desire. This is an Other that constitutes, not the limit of masculinity in a feminine alterity, but the site of a masculine self-elaboration. (Butler 56)

As they approach Janet and Jael, male characters in the novel assume this phallocentric stance in treating these female characters as if they will gladly serve as the "Object, the Other of a (heterosexualized) masculine desire" (Butler 56). However, to their disappointment, Janet and Jael refuse even to participate in this system revolving around the centrality of a male's desire for and possession of the prized organ. Originating from a planet with no men, Janet arrives on Earth without having ever seen a naked male body. It is Joanna who introduces her to visuals of it. Upon first interacting with Janet, Joanna remarks, "She wanted to see a man naked (we got pictures). She wanted to see a baby man naked (we got somebody's nephew)…She uncovered him…She was astonished" (Russ 32). For Janet, the primacy of the phallus is

a foreign concept that never entered into her psychoanalytical development. Moreover, as a happily married woman with a spouse named Vittoria, Janet directly refuses to serve as an object of male desire. When a male host at a party physically restrains her, telling her, "Nah, you're not *going*…Give us a good-bye kiss," Janet throws him onto the floor, leaving the host flabbergasted at her display of physical might (Russ 46). Hurling insults at her, he calls her various names: "Bitch…Prude…Ball-breaker…Goddamn cancerous castrator" (Russ 46). However, not understanding these terms, Janet simply remains "puzzled" (Russ 46). The term *castrator* does not even mean anything to Janet. Confirming with Joanna that these seemingly meaningless phrases are indeed insults, she slaps the host, pins him to the floor once again, and breaks his arm. She refuses to tolerate such behavior, and she displays her might as she brings her assailant down to the ground.

While Janet demonstrates complete disregard for the supposedly foundational development of the realization that one does or does not possess the phallus and for her supposed role as castrator, Jael takes advantage of a system that, while professing to focus on the phallus as signifier of meaning, ultimately rests on the existence of the not-phallus, the Other of the phallus, to ensure its own primacy. Arguing that phallocentric systems actually rely on the Other to give any meaning to the phallus in the first place, Butler suggests that the Other becomes necessary for value to be established; it is the fear of lack that places an importance on the phallus. Butler asserts:

> For women to "be" the Phallus means, then, to reflect the power of the Phallus, to signify that power, to "embody" the Phallus, to supply the site to which it penetrates, and to signify the Phallus through "being" its

> Other, its absence, its lack, the dialectical confirmation of this identity…power is wielded by this feminine position of not-having, that the masculine subject who "has" the Phallus requires this Other to confirm and, hence, be the Phallus in its "extended" sense. (Butler 56)

Butler finds for women a sense of agency in the position of "not-having." Men, seeing women as the "Other that lacks the Phallus," need the lack of women as validation of the idea that they indeed possess something of which there could be a lack. Contesting the basis of the phallus's primacy as a signifying construct for both sexual identification and the acquisition of language, assuming that the phallus is somehow ideal and that female sexuality is a lack of this ideal, Butler asserts that even within this privileging of male superiority, the importance of the "Other" remains crucial. Without the lacking "Other," the superiority of the phallus could remain in danger, for its superiority rests secure in the belief in the Other's inferiority. The signification of the phallus therefore functions as long as women, the castrated Other, silently lift the male into the realm of language governed by the male voice, or the Father, validating his passage into and assumption of the role of the "speaking 'I'" (Butler 57). Observing the irony of a system that works so tenaciously to evidence the inferiority of women only to rely on that inferiority as the foundation bolstering the entire system, Butler notes,

> This task [of phallus-privileging systems] is confounded, to say the least, when the demand that women reflect the autonomous power of masculine subject/signifier becomes essential to the construction of that autonomy, and thus, becomes the basis of a radical dependency that effectively undercuts the function it serves. (Butler 57)

On Manland, against which Jael's own Womanland wars, this dependency becomes particularly pronounced as sex-change surgery functions as the method by which boys become suitable objects for the "real-men." Describing the men-inhabiting land, Jael outlines this habitual process: "There, in ascetic and healthful settlements in the country, little boys are made into Men—though some don't quite make it; sex-change surgery begins at sixteen. One out of seven fails early and makes the full change; one out of seven fails later and (refusing surgery) makes only half a change…Five out of seven Manlanders make it; these are the 'real-men'" (Russ 167). No longer possessing the phallus, these "changed" and "half-changed" make suitable objects that remind the "real-men" of their own desire for the phallus they still have. Recognizing this dependency, Jael goes to Manland under the auspices of negotiating some kind of deal between the sparring parties. During her mission, she capitalizes on this need that the "real-men" have for attributing value to the phallus. When Lenny, a "real-man," asks her, "Don't you dream about it? Don't all you girls dream about us?" Jael responds reassuringly (Russ 168). With this comfort that the girls, those lacking the phallus, desire the valued treasure, Lenny then consoles himself: "I can see it in your face whenever you come here. You get excited just looking at it" (Russ 168). Amazed by the eagerness and quickness with which her male contacts accept her consoling comments, Jael thinks, "*Astonishing how each of them has to be reassured of my loyalty…Even more astonishing that they believe me*" (Russ 169). Jael encounters this male belief in the female desire for the penis again when she talks to a character named Boss. To their faces, she upholds the phallic primacy and guarantees her desire for the organ, assuring the men that she is no castrator, just admirer of the penis she cannot

have. However, she thinks to herself, "How can you love anyone who is a castrated You?" (Russ 180).

What is interesting about Jael is that, on the surface, she appears the most fragmented of all the women. Joanna describes her as a set of body parts, saying that she "is crippled…the ends of her fingers…were once caught in a press and are growing cancerous—and to be sure, if you look at them closely you can see folds of loose, dead skin over the ends of her fingernails. She has hairpin-shaped scars under her ears, too" (Russ 159). Moreover, Jael refers to herself as a type of Frankenstein figure. An "employee of the Bureau of Comparative Ethnology and a specialist in disguises" (Russ 160), she alludes to the fact that she may have undergone some kind of surgery herself. Describing her own body, Jael says, "*Me with a new face, a puffy mask. Laid over the old one in strips of plastic, a blond Hallowe'en ghoul on top of the S.S. uniform*" (Russ 19). While Joanna sees herself as being a product of internal dismemberment, Jael quite literally appears dismembered externally. Of the mighty Jael, Joanna gives a frightening account: "Now J…is really terrifying, for she's invisible. Against the black curtains her head and hands float in sinister disconnection…She stepped out against the white wall, a woman-shaped hole, a black cardboard cut-out…Those disbodied, almost crippled hands clasped themselves…vanished again" (Russ 158).

Quite literally, Jael is frightening. The other women notice "her gray hair, her lined face, her rather macabre grin, for her teeth seem to be one fused ribbon of steel" (Russ 158). Moreover, like a stereotypical villain, she has a horrifying laugh, a spine-shivering laugh. Joanna tells us, "Her real laugh is the worst human sound I have ever heard: a hard, screeching yell that ends in gasps and rusty sobbing, as if some

mechanical vulture on a gigantic garbage heap on the surface of the moon were giving one forced shriek for the death of all organic life" (Russ 159). Even her eyes appear "silver, most unnatural" (Russ 159). She is a force with which to be reckoned; she has "[c]laws, talons like a cat's but bigger, a little more dull than wood brads but good for tearing…[with] teeth [that] are a sham over metal" (Russ 181). As she prepares to kill a male character named Boss-man, she tells him to look at her, to see her with his eyes. She says, "I told him to open his eyes, that I didn't want to kill him with his eyes shut, for God's sake…OPEN YOUR EYES…BEFORE I KILL YOU" (Russ 181). However, whether or not Boss opens his eyes, Jael has something violent planned for him. In response to his remarks, "This is what God made you for. I'm going to fuck you. I'm going to screw you until you can't stand up. You want it. You want to be mastered…All you women, you're all women, you're sirens, you're beautiful, you're waiting for me, waiting for a man, waiting for me to stick it in, waiting for me, me, me" (Russ 181), Jael simply think that she has seen this act before. His statements mean nothing to her. It does not matter what he says, for she has her own agenda, saying, "Remember, I don't threaten. I don't play" (Russ 181-2). Instead, she acts. She ponders various ways of killing him and thinks, "A certain squeamishness prevents me from using my teeth in front of witnesses—the best way to silence an enemy is to bite out his larynx" (Russ 182). Although deciding against the biting, she nevertheless comes up with another way to silence Boss-man and end his penis-laden tirade against her:

> Boss was muttering something angry about his erection so, angry enough for two, I produced my own—by this I mean that the grafted muscles on my fingers and hands pulled back the loose skin…I could have drilled

> him between the eyes, but if I do that, I all but leave my signature on him; it's freakier and funnier to make it look as if a wolf did it…I raked him gaily on the neck and chin and when he embraced me in rage, sank my claws into his back. (Russ 182)

As "Boss is pumping his life out into the carpet," Jael stands above him, "[c]lean and satisfied from head to foot" (Russ 182). Jael has no regrets, no remorse for the murder she has committed. When one of the women asks her if it were necessary to kill Boss-man, to pierce his flesh with her fingers, Jael resoundingly retorts: "I don't give a damn whether it was necessary or not…I liked it" (Russ 184).

In some ways, Jael does fulfill the image of the castrating, dismembering woman who produces fear, absence, and loss in the bodies of male victims. Because of the violent, deadly presence of Jael's character, we might question Russ's intentions. Why would a modern author of science fiction present a woman as a horrifying creature? Why would she create a character who feeds into a stereotypical image of woman as figure of horror? After all, with her claws, "sham teeth over…steel ones" (Russ 183), and thirst for the death of her enemies, Jael does assume the appearance of some kind of monster from a horror story. Her horrifying body and violence against men conjure up images of supernatural beings that fill male-produced stories of ghosts, monsters, and demons. For instance, upon reading "The Painted Skin," one of the horror stories found in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, an eighteenth-century collection of fascinating ghost tales written by Pu Songling, the description of Jael as a monster sounds quite familiar as a "green-faced monster, a ghoul with great jagged teeth like a saw" tears the beating heart from a living male, ripping it out from the flesh, still

steaming, and runs away with the beating heart in its gruesome green hand. From reading a story like this, one cannot help but judge this fearsome creature donning the "human pelt, the skin" of a beautiful woman as nothing more than a manifestation of absolute horror and dismemberment clothed in a womanly form (Songling, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* 129). In much the same way that Jael attacks Boss, "letting him spray urgently into the rug" (Russ 182), this monster dismembers her victim, for "[c]limbing straight up on to the bed, she tore open Wang's chest, plucked out his heart and made off with it into the night" (Songling, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* 126). Similarly, in a tale called *Romance of the Ghost Maiden*, a beautiful ghost who died "at the age of eighteen," initially attempts to seduce a man right out of his own flesh and to feed his blood to a hungry vampire, while successfully killing the other men staying with him and appearing to be a phantom of male destruction (Songling, *Romance of the Ghost Maiden* 43). Ultimately, she instigates sexual relations with men while another ghost drains their blood through their feet. Supernatural female beings haunting the world of the strange and horrific appear to be villainous creatures ready to ravage the male body, reminding us of Jael.

Through these stories, female gender in the form of supernatural beings appears to become something frightening and horrifying and detached from a normal sphere of female behavior. Quoting Marlon Hom's summation of the depiction of supernatural female figures in horror stories, the scholar Allan Barr notes that this kind of "work has created, in the words of a recent article, 'a unique type of feminine image whose actions are in total contradiction to the conventional image of mortal women'" (Hom qtd. Barr 501). Barr goes on to say, "'Daring,' 'defiant,' 'alienated from society, 'indifferent to

traditional morality': it is in such terms that Pu's heroines are most commonly described" (Barr 501). It is true that female figures like Jael and other terrorizing women do *not* conform to the "conventional image of mortal women." These living and breathing female characters do not fit the stereotype of the typical woman who prepares food in the kitchen and puts the children to bed. They are not housekeepers, Rosie the Riveters, Lucy Ricardos, or even Diane DiPrimas who write about female genitals. Rather, these characters completely and radically challenge the expected view of what a woman's role should be. Characters like Jael rip off the skin of female stereotypes, exposing the limitations of such stereotypes about women and destroying these expectations.

Before criticizing the roles of the supernatural women inhabiting "The Painted Skin" and *Romance of a Ghost Maiden*, it is important to note the difference in the portrayal of mortal women from supernatural women in such horror tales. While the old woman in monstrous form in "The Painted Skin" and the young murderer in *Romance of the Ghost Maiden* seek to control their male subjects through domination and sexual persuasion, the women of the natural realm generally demonstrate a sense of devotion and filial piety to their husbands, accepting a position of subordination to them and observing Confucian principles in their relationships. Confucianism, "the emblem of Chinese high culture" (Rosenlee 3), underscores the system of hierarchy present in relationships through the idea of filial piety. For example, in "The Painted Skin," Wang's wife serves him in all respects. Although Wang brings home the monster in disguise for sexual pleasure, his wife nevertheless remains devoted to him. When he tells his wife about his liaison with the girl, his wife merely "advised him to send her

away" (Songling, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* 127). Even after the monster rips Wang's heart from his body, leaving "his chest a bloody pulp" (Songling, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* 129), his wife continues to remain devoted to her husband, swallowing "a great gob of phlegm" from a beggar in hopes of resurrecting her mutilated husband. Moreover, while no one else can bear to prepare Wang's body for burial, the wife "lifted him up in her arms and started carefully replacing his internal organs, sobbing so fiercely that she began to choke and feel nauseous" (Songling, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* 132). Similarly, other stories in *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* likewise preserve the portrayal of female devotion. For example, in "Dying Together," a man named Zhu dies as his family watches him pass away from life into death. However, as his family was mourning for him, they "heard him call out, loud and clear, and hurried over to the bed" (Songling, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* 202). Bewildered by the fact that the man was alive, his family gathered around him, but Zhu only wished to speak to his wife. Explaining his journey back to life, he says, "When I went, it never occurred to me to try and come back. But then, after a few miles, I kept thinking to myself: I'm leaving my wife behind! There'd be no joy left in life for an old body like you, having to depend on children for everything…So I decided to come back and take you with me" (Songling, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* 202). Through his statement, Zhu seems to express concern for leaving his wife because she is "an old body." However, in another sense, this story evidences a sense of forced female devotion to a man in both life and death. Commenting on marriage customs and widows in ancient China, Ray Baber says that although widows "could remarry (after three years of mourning)…it was considered such a disgrace that only the very poor

with whom necessity overrode convention dared to disregard the moral law which bound the loyal wife to her husband even in death" (Baber 139). Because Zhu's wife is traditionally "bound" to her husband even in his death, Zhu expects his wife to die with him. Bound to a tradition "of notorious social practices such as female infanticide, child-servant/child-bride, concubinage, footbinding, and widow chastity across a wide range of different historical times and regions" (Rosenlee 15), Zhu's wife finds herself committed to her husband both emotionally and physically. Although she does not think he is being serious when he says that he is going to die again with her, the wife nevertheless lies beside her husband and dies with him. The narrator says, "Zhu now lay down with his head on the pillow and commanded his wife to do likewise, tapping on the bed beside him with his hand…She rested her head on the pillow and lay there next to him, stiff as a corpse" (Songling, *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* 204).

What is most compelling about horror stories like "The Painted Skin" and *Romance of the Ghost Maiden* is that the female "villains" in these works challenge the male expectations of female devotion and behavior. Although one could not help but commend Zhu's wife for accepting her role as devoted widow and lying down in death with her husband or admire Wang's wife for swallowing phlegm from a beggar to resurrect her husband, it is the villains, the "bad" women like Jael, who are the rebels, the ones who do not expectorate onto their husband's dead corpses nor join him on his deathbed. While they constitute the figures Russ might call "the Crazy Womb, the Ball-breaking Bitch, the Fanged Killer Lady" (Russ 184), they do not live and die for men, dismembering them instead. Women like Jael refute the idea that their womanhood defines them as compassionate, caring creatures who will care about the well-being of

men. When one of the women lectures Jael about "the serious urgency of womankind's eternal quest for love, the ages-long effort to heal the wounds of the sick soul, the infinite, caring compassion of the female saint," she attacks this idea, responding, "There is a pretense of my own side that we are too refined to care, too compassionate for revenge—this is bullshit, I tell the idealists" (Russ 184).

Jael does not simply question male authority; instead, she kills it, repositioning herself as a powerful lack, not signifying other. Although her body is a compilation of surgical alterations (Russ 19), Jael is not limited by the deterioration of her body. Unlike Joanna, who provides an unflattering portrait of the female body, Jael embraces the power of her own body to do more than represent the "vagina dentata." However, unlike her earthly companions who suffer from a gendered deterioration of the self, Jael utilizes her invisibility as a weapon against the men who threaten her visibility. The Manlander Jael kills does not even see her. While exclaiming that she is "a woman…a beautiful woman" (Russ 181), Jael remains hidden in his sight; after all, she is the "Individual Man" and "perfectly invisible, a chalk sketch of a woman" (Russ 177). Her invisible body becomes her visible weapon as she marks herself onto the bodies of men. Being dismembered, being disembodied, allows her to imprint herself onto that which is membered and bodied. Jael becomes a character who quite clearly elucidates the power of the voice unbound by the body. In her seminal work *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985), Elaine Scarry discusses the limitations of the physical body. She says, "[T]o have a body is to be describable, creatable, alterable, and woundable. To have no body, to have only a voice, is to be none of these things; it is to be the wounder but not oneself woundable, to be the creator or the one who alters but

oneself neither creatable nor alterable" (Scarry 206). Although Scarry uses these terms to analyze the relationship between bodied man and the disembodied Judeo-Christian God of the Old Testament, she reveals a certain power underlying this kind of relationship between that which has a body and that which has no body. Scarry says,

> In discussions of power, it is conventionally the case that those with power are said to be "represented" whereas those without power are "without representation." It may therefore seem contradictory to discover that the scriptures systematically ensure that the Omnipotent will be materially unrepresented and that the comparatively powerless humanity will be materially represented by their own deep embodiment. But to have no body is to have no limits on one's extension out into the world; conversely, to have a body, a body made emphatic by being continually altered…is to have one's sphere of extension contracted down to a small circle of one's immediate physical presence. Consequently, to be intensely embodied is the equivalent of being unrepresented and (here as in many secular contexts) is almost always the condition of those without power. (Scarry 207)

Scarry notes an important connection between the body and power. We tend to think of representation as contingent on the physical presence of a body. However, having a body does not necessarily indicate that one has power or any form of representation. Though the body is one's way of being present, the physical limitations of the present body delineate a certain sphere of existence, a space occupied by that body. Representation of the physical body becomes limited to that space of existence.

Thus, Scarry locates within the lack of a physical body the ability to extend that space and push through its margins, boundaries of existence. She specifically points out, "But to have no body is to have no limits on one's extension out into the world" (Scarry 207). Though we might think of Jael as a disempowered individual because of her lack of a bodied presence, it is this lack which ultimately becomes her power. While fragmented, Jael's influence extends past her own planet and allows her to find the fellow "selves" she seeks. Though dismembered, she can attack her enemies without alerting them to her presence. Whereas her male victims have bodies that she can kill, her "perfectly invisible" state allows her to approach them without their knowledge. Like Elaine Scarry's example of the Judeo-Christian God whose "invisible presence is asserted, made visible, in the perceivable alterations He brings about in the human body" (Scarry 183), Jael makes her own self known through displaying her power in male flesh. Utilizing her invisibility as a weapon against the men who threaten her visibility, she makes her presence known in the body. Revealing one of her killing techniques, Jael exposes the power of her dismemberment. Even calling herself a "ghoul," she remarks that "*it's a great elevator technique, holding your forefinger to the back of somebody's neck while passing the fourth floor, knowing he'll never find out that you're not all there. (Sorry, But watch out)*" (Russ 19). While the Wife of Bath suggests that a different definition of gender and sexuality will arise from whoever is doing the painting, the painter or the lion, Jael dismembers the painter and begins her own painting with a blood-dipped brush.

Chapter 4: The Dangers of Perception

> She realizes that the ideals of beauty, built up in the fine arts, have excluded her almost entirely. Instead, the grotesque Aunt Jemimas of the street-car advertisements proclaim only an ability to serve, without grace or loveliness. Nor does the drama catch her finest spirit. She is most often used to provoke the mirthless laugh of ridicule; or to portray feminine viciousness or vulgarity not peculiar to Negroes. This is the shadow over her. To a race naturally sunny comes the twilight of self-doubt and a sense of personal inferiority. It cannot be denied that these are potent and detrimental influences, though not generally recognized because they are in the realm of the mental and spiritual. [14]

A woman's body appears on the screen. Draped in a luxurious evening gown, she stands as an erect, elegant, and graceful actress. Ready for an evening at the Oscars, Zendaya, a popular television star on the Disney channel, walked on the red carpet during a television broadcast of the event. In a "Fashion Police" episode appearing after the awards ceremony, a host named Giuliana Rancic overlooked each part of Zendaya's impressive ensemble, focusing only on one part of her body: her hair. Criticizing Zendaya's display of dreadlocks, Rancic mused that her hair is "really heavy – it overwhelms her, and it's just too boho…Zendaya is more high-fashion. The hair to me on her is making her a little more boho. Like I feel like she smells like patchouli oil. Or

[14] McDougald, Elise Johnson. "The Task of Negro Womanhood." *Double-Take: A Revisionist Harlem Renaissance Anthology*. Ed. Venetria K. Patton and Maureen Honey. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001. 103-108. Print.

weed."[15] Her comments ignited much controversy, for she had dismembered Zendaya's glamorous look, focusing singly on the appearance of her choice of hairstyle for a ceremony. Rancic apologized to Zendaya, saying, "I'm sorry I offended you and others. I was referring to a bohemian chic look. Had NOTHING to do with race and NEVER would!!!" Her ill-worded perception of Zendaya's hair thankfully produced no physical ramifications; however, perception can indeed produce some dangerous consequences. In a case of cyber-bullying in 2013, a girl posted a note to another girl, telling her to "drink bleach and die." That girl, a twelve-year-old child, committed suicide. She jumped off a building, shattering her bones, crushing her organs, and dismembering her body parts in a matter of seconds.[16] What a person thinks of another person's behavior, appearance, or actions can accomplish extreme results. Perception can kill, destroy, and dismember. Marie-Elena John's 2006 novel *Unburnable* demonstrates these dismembering effects that can manifest themselves in the body, and it highlights the far-reaching dangers of perception.

Initial reviews of *Unburnable* comment on the novel's complex unfolding of the story of Lillian Baptiste's search for truth in the historical events surrounding the identity of her biological mother, Iris, who suffered incredible dismemberment, and the murder trial that convicted and dismembered her grandmother, Matilda, through the physical punishment of hanging. In the novel, Lillian, traveling with her friend and potential love interest, Teddy, returns to her home in Dominica to find answers regarding her place in the complicated history of her family and uncover an actual

[15] Olya, Gabrielle. "Part of Giuliana Rancic's Zendaya Joke Was Edited Out, Says Source." *People*. Time Inc., 4 March 2015. Web. 12 December 20115.

[16] Hellmich, Nancy. "Lessons Learned from Latest Cyberbullying Tragedy." *USA Today*. USA Today, 16 October 2013. Web. 1 March 2016.

account of the trial. One review of *Unburnable* in the *Library Journal* notes that Lillian, while leaving her home in Dominica to live in the United States, "has never stopped questioning—maybe even obsessing over—what happened to the women in her family…Was her grandmother truly guilty? What happened at her trial?" (Bader 78). In the midst of answering these questions, the novel provides what the reviewer calls "fascinating social observations about the politics of class, gender, and race" (Bader 78). Another reviewer, writing for *Black Issues Book Review,* likewise comments on the thematic material of the novel, saying, "John takes the risk of incorporating many themes into a central story of three generations of women…She touches on almost every aspect of the African Diaspora: colonization, class struggles, immigration, internalized racism, ancestral traditions and religion, to name a few" (Doig 34). These themes surface at the very "core of the novel" when Lillian "returns [to Dominica] to unravel the mystery" of what happened to her family (Doig 34).

Perception

One of the puzzle pieces of the "mystery" surrounding Matilda's trial that ultimately comes to light is Mary-Alice's involvement in the case Lillian and Teddy are trying to solve, involvement that indeed stems from the "internalized racism" Doig notes. An American nun from Texas who had left the United States to do missionary work in Dominica, Mary-Alice had initially become involved in Lillian's history when she met Iris, Lillian's mother. Concerned that Iris "was far too beautiful to escape the appetite of the men" in any household where the Catholic school might place her as a boarder (John 58), Mary-Alice had at that time tried to ensure Iris's safety from becoming "somebody's sexual slave" (John 59) by finding her a home in a Lebanese

community whose members "only mated among themselves, for life" (John 63). However, Iris, catching the attention of John Baptiste, had left that home and begun a sexual relationship that continued into Baptiste's marriage to Cecile Richard. Iris's sexual liaison with Baptiste had prompted Mary-Alice to find Matilda and alert her to her daughter's activities. Later on, Mary-Alice had also become involved in Lillian's life directly, befriending Icilma, who informally adopted Lillian, and attempting to baptize Lillian into the Catholic Church and shield her from the stories regarding her mother and grandmother.

At first glance, Mary-Alice appears to have had only sincere intentions regarding Lillian's family. "Pure of body and mind," she had originally come to Dominica to raise money for prenatal clinics and immediately had taken Iris under her protection upon fearing that the child would become a victim of abuse (John 59). Appalled by the relationship between a child and a grown man, Mary-Alice had believed that finding Matilda was the answer to stopping Iris's affair, an answer about which she had "fasted and prayed" (John 79). Briefly before her death, Matilda had even remembered Mary-Alice as "the nun, who was, after all, only trying to save her daughter" (John 273). However, in spite of her intentions, initial "self-congratulatory prayers of thanks for the deliverance of Iris" (John 64), and voyage to find Matilda, Mary-Alice ultimately impacts Lillian's family negatively by making decisions with consequences far more powerful than the mission with which she had come to Dominica in the first place and sought refuge for Iris. For all of her good intentions, she had "been an unwitting cause of much of that torment" currently experienced by Lillian in her search for answers (John 217). She unknowingly contributes to dismembering

Lillian's family.

Mary-Alice appears to be a lovely, well-mannered white woman who only wants to protect Iris. However, she approaches Lillian's family with an embedded sense of racism that guides her decision-making process. Although she does not outwardly display mean and cruel attitudes towards black people, she internally uses judgment, color, and expectations to guide her actions. In "White Power, the Colonial Situation," the first chapter in *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, Kwame Ture (formerly Stokely Carmichael) and Charles Hamilton begin by stating the need for an explanation of what racism is because the term indicates a "reality" for black people but at the same time seems to be a common utterance without a clear definition behind it (Ture and Hamilton 3). Providing a very lucid definition of racism, they state that it is "the predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race for the purpose of *subordinating* a racial group and maintaining control over that group" (Ture and Hamilton 3). They then go on to discuss the various manifestations of racism that have appeared in the American context. On one hand, racism can be a very public and direct act that physically displays a white person's devaluation of a black person. On the other hand, racism can appear in social systems more latently under the guise of institutional or collective attempts to ensure that the black individual remains at a lower level of existence than the white individual. Ture and Hamilton state, "Racism is both overt and covert. It takes two, closely related forms: individual whites acting against individual blacks, and acts by the total white community against the black community. We call these individual racism and institutional racism" (Ture and Hamilton 4).

This division of racism into two categories is important because it implicates

white individuals as role-players in racism if they support any systems that make decisions based on race. According to this definition of racism, an individual cannot claim absolution from "institutional racism" even if she or he has not directly engaged in an act of "individual racism" because society as a whole continues to operate under racist enterprises. Ture and Hamilton suggest,

> "Respectable" individuals can absolve themselves from individual blame: *they* would never plant a bomb in a church; *they* would never stine a black family. But they continue to support political officials and institutions that would and do perpetuate institutionally racist policies. Thus *acts* of overt, individual racism may not typify the society, but institutional racism does—with the support of covert, individual *attitudes* of racism. (Ture and Hamilton 5)

Their definition of racism prompts the question: how could "institutional racism" exist without the "attitudes" of "individual racism" behind it? How can one attempt to deny a role in racism while actively promoting a system of subordination that positions one group as being inherently "better" than another? This exercise of "betterness" is in itself racism, and this racism, while not always exercised by one individual against another individual, continues to be exercised by one community against another community. In his essay "Toward Black Liberation" in *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*, Ture elaborates on "institutional racism," showing that it is a communal experience. He says, "There have been traditionally two communities in America: the white community, which controlled and defined the forms that all institutions within the society would take; and the Negro community, which has been excluded from

participation in the power decisions that shaped the society" (Ture 123). This essay makes it clear that racism is not just rooted in individual or institutional responses but is a direct result of power relations that allow one group to rise above another group. By maintaining the right to make "power decisions," the white society continues to engage in racism because it does not allow the black community to have a voice in those decisions. In any form, racism, whether institutional or individual, denies access to power to some individuals while granting all power to others.

Although Mary-Alice would not consider herself as complicit in any form of racism, she nevertheless engages in a system whereby she sees herself as more "respectable," more moral than Matilda. While she would not have engaged in direct dismemberment of a black person, she does become participatory in a system that hangs a woman, severs her spinal cord, and punishes her permanently. Approached by Lillian and Teddy to provide her version of Matilda's murder trial that took place so many years earlier, Mary-Alice tells them, "I was a character witness…I was asked to give my opinion of whether she was a decent person or not" (John 217). Attempting to provide context for her involvement in Matilda's death before giving Lillian and Teddy all of the "details…even the part she had left out of her testimony, the part she had refused to recall, which had caused too much shame even to have been recounted to Bird [her husband]," Mary-Alice acknowledges color as a relevant factor in the verdict she had given against Matilda, as evidence in her participation in the ultimate dismemberment of Matilda's body. Prefacing the rest of her account by saying, "I don't say it was fair. It was the late forties. I was a white woman, a former nun," Mary-Alice prepares herself to tell Lillian the truth (John 218). Reflecting back on her exact words, she remembers,

"What I said…what I said was that I found her to be morally corrupt" (John 218). While Mary-Alice refutes Teddy's suggestion that her opinion of Matilda itself produced a conviction, saying, "Matilda confessed to killing the people. I never said she killed nobody," she nevertheless admits to providing a statement, a statement "helping to bring about a woman's death" (John 218).

Although she had married a black man, renounced her vows as a nun, and grown dreadlocks, Mary-Alice's evaluation of her black female counterpart as "morally corrupt" falls in line with white estimations of black women in the Caribbean as documented by Erna Brodber's socio-historical studies of the region. Tracing written evidence of white women's perspectives of Caribbean black women to the nineteenth century with the journal of Lady Nugent, wife of Sir George Nugent, who served as governor of Jamaica from 1801 to 1805, Brodber demonstrates various white perspectives of black women, starting with Lady Nugent's comments (*The Continent* 21). Lady Nugent, positioning white as superior to black, says, "I have found much difficulty to persuade those great people and superior beings, our white domestics, that the blacks are human beings, or have souls" (Nugent 98). This attitude of white supremacy pervades Lady Nugent's written observations. Using imagery that Brodber interprets as dog-like (*The Continent* 21), Lady Nugent comments on a particular home, saying, "This house is perfectly in Creole style. A number of negroes, men, women, and children, running and lying about, in all parts of it. Never in my life did I smell so many" (Nugent 76). Moreover, noting "how fast these black women bred" (Nugent 69), Lady Nugent characterizes their offspring as animalistic, saying, "One of the black women produced two boys this morning. Went to see them, and they were exactly like

two little monkeys" (Nugent 42). In other unflattering characterizations, she refers to a black girl as "remarkably thick-lipped and ugly" (Nugent 69) and to Captain Johnson's "ugly mulatto favorite" (Nugent 173). She dismembers the black servants into black physical attributes, seeing and labeling their body parts as inferior to her own. For instance, in contrast to these unattractive descriptions, Lady Nugent notably refers to beauty as a trait she herself possesses. Having overheard compliments regarding her and her husband, she remarks, "I heard it whispered on the parade this morning, that General Nugent was one of *the finest men* that ever was seen, and Mrs. Nugent, although small, *a perfect beauty*" (Nugent 4). In a later entry, she complains about the mosquitos that threaten to taint that "beauty" (Nugent 22). Like the "frail lady in the fine castle" Merle Hodge describes in her introduction to Brodber's *Perceptions of Caribbean Women: Towards a Documentation of Stereotypes* (Hodge ix), Lady Nugent laments that her "face, neck, hands, and arms, have been martyrs" to such a disagreeable aspect of living in her Jamaican castle.

For Lady Nugent, black women were also synonymous with labor. Unable to see the black women as anything but servants in white households, she refers to the "black women [set] to work," hoping "now that the house will be clean" (Nugent 47). In an earlier entry, she notes, "Margaret Clifford set the black ladies to work, that our rooms may be a little less filthy before we go to bed again" (Nugent 11). Seeing herself as part of a race superior to the black race, Lady Nugent consistently describes blacks as belonging to a lower class of existence and occupying an animal-like state. As one of the "great people and superior beings," Lady Nugent also expresses her responsibility to Christianize black people. She praises white efforts to indoctrinate black servants into

the Christian religion and exclaims, "How delightful this is! I wish to God it could be made general, and I am sure the benefits arising from it, in every point of view, would be incalculable" (Nugent 242). She records the progress of her "blackies," saying, "The blackies perfect in their prayers. Read to them myself this evening, and intend doing so in future" (Nugent 103). In another entry, she again comments on her role in Christianizing the blacks, saying, "Read, write, draw, and teach the blackies their catechism" (Nugent 53). While she assumed moral responsibility for the black population, it is interesting to note that Lady Nugent records a prank involving "making an old black woman steal a pair of gloves" from a general while he was asleep (Nugent 121). Nevertheless, as a superior white, Lady Nugent verbalizes the many "benefits" that would come from teaching blacks the Christian religion. As Brodber notes, "Lady Nugent in 1801-1805 had a ball teaching her 'blackies' her catechism, the theological understanding of the British people, teaching them her prayers and getting them christened into a variation of the Christian religion" (Brodber, *The Continent* 22). In Lady Nugent's ideas, people with black skin are ugly, inferior, and in desperate need of her religion. Her own perceived superiority becomes the mechanism by which she can disassemble their identities as human beings and leave them in pieces shattered by her perception.

Though quite descriptive, Lady Nugent's journal is by far not the only written source reflecting pejorative comments regarding the black population in the Caribbean. In her introduction to Brodber's *Perceptions of Caribbean Women: Towards a Documentation of Stereotypes,* Hodge identifies two particular categories of women that, according to her argument, appear in Caribbean novels and support Brodber's

conclusions: those of "Ideal Woman" and "Real Woman." Hodge says, "What emerges in general from these novels is the tension between official and real culture…This tension is a permanent feature of Caribbean culture, and the discrepancy between the Ideal Woman and Real Woman documented by Brodber is but one aspect of this phenomenon" (Hodge viii). While Hodge acknowledges that a distinction has commonly arisen between conceptions of the female as she should be and the female as she is, she argues that this distinction regarding behavioral expectations is particularly alive in the Caribbean as a result of colonization, saying, "The culture which has developed in the Caribbean, however, is a culture which as yet does not recognize itself, which sees itself as (and is, in many of its features) largely derivative of the Western metropolitan culture which remains the official culture *and* the effective prescription-making culture of the region" (Hodge ix). This tension between Western culture and Caribbean culture does come to the forefront in various Caribbean novels as women struggle to establish personal identities in the midst of polarizing categories that would label them as "ideal" if they are Western enough and "real" if they are not. Perception of these categories remains grounded in Western assumptions that use Western culture as the marker for establishing what is "ideal" in the first place and that visually, socially, and culturally dismember the identity and integrity of a woman who does not fall into the prescribed category.

Hodge argues that we can visibly notice this battle between "ideal" and "real" in Caribbean novels that discuss relationships between Western culture and Caribbean culture complicated by the oppression of colonization. For example, in *Crick Crack Monkey* (1970), a novel by Merle Hodge, we see this tension very noticeably depicted

in the roles of Tantie and Auntie Beatrice. Although both of these women are blood-related aunts who serve as caretakers in their niece's life, they stand in stark contrast to one another in terms of their behavior, or more specifically, of their level of adherence to the "Western metropolitan culture" or the "prescription-making culture." In relationship to this "prescription-making culture," Auntie Beatrice emerges as a more "ideal" representative of the "official culture" than Tantie, for Auntie Beatrice works to construct an acceptable image of herself within Western expectations. She has a car, sends her children to the proper schools and to dance lessons, attends mass, takes Carol and Jessica "to all the birthday parties and garden parties" (Hodge, *Crick Crack Monkey* 85), rents a beach-house in Canapo, and entertains Father Sheridan, whose visits constituted one of her "social triumphs" (Hodge, *Crick Crack Monkey* 117). She preserves a socially proper exterior while raising her children to participate in the customs and rituals characteristic of " all nice people's children" and also tries to initiate her niece Tee, whom she calls Cynthia, into the figurative and even literal dress code belonging to these "nice people's children" (Hodge, *Crick Crack Monkey* 85). Moreover, Auntie Beatrice speaks English in a very formal and polite manner. For example, when talking to the child in Miss de Vertueil's dance school, she tells the child, "Thank you, dear…that is very nice of you," and similarly greets Miss De Vertueil politely, saying, "Afternoon Miss de Vertueil…how are you? I was wondering if you could try her [Tee] out for the troupe" (Hodge, *Crick Crack Monkey* 83). She commands Tee to mirror her own verbal behavior, saying, "Remember to speak nicely, dear" (Hodge, *Crick Crack Monkey* 82). Unlike Auntie Beatrice, whom Tantie refers to as "the bitch," Tantie's behavior does not reflect the "Western metropolitan culture" to

which Auntie Beatrice so strongly subscribes. Tantie lives in what Hodge terms the "real culture," or the real world. Tantie's life is not one of garden parties and dance troupes; rather, it is a "company [that] was loud and hilarious and the intermittent squawk and flurry of mirth…[like] the fowl-run when something fell into the midst of the fat hens" (Hodge, *Crick Crack Monkey* 4). In response to the paperwork regarding the children presented by a policewoman to her and Auntie Beatrice, Tantie, using a much less polite and formal tone than Beatrice, shouts, "Paper? Wha paper…I would shit on allyu paper! You ain't have no right! Get to Hell out mih yard" (Hodge, *Crick Crack Monkey* 34). Furthermore, Tantie makes clothes for Tee, clothes that Auntie Beatrice refers to as "niggery-looking" (Hodge, *Crick Crack Monkey* 85), and she eats "coolie-food" that would be insulting to bring "into Auntie Beatrice's house" (Hodge, *Crick Crack Monkey* 118). Auntie Beatrice does not see Tantie as a person; rather, she sees her as a walking, breathing manifestation of impolite, socially incorrect, "niggery-looking" behavior. Neither aunt can have a relationship with each other because Tantie sees Beatrice as a "bitch," while Beatrice condemns Tantie for not subscribing to the "prescription-making culture." Perception becomes a powerful tool as each aunt makes decisions about the other through dismembering her into parts: "ideal" ones or "real" ones.

In another Caribbean novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Jean Rhys, perception according to the categories of "Ideal" and "Real" identified by Hodge once again surfaces as a theme with life-altering consequences. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is divided into three separate narratives. Narrated by Antoinette, the first section of the novel recounts her memories as a child. The second section, told predominantly from the perspective of

her English husband, provides insight into both the husband's and the wife's views of their marriage while describing the husband's developing suspicion that his wife is mentally disturbed. Returning as the narrator for the third section, Antoinette brings the novel to a climax as she reveals her barricaded existence in her husband's house in England, an existence that, while purposing to be for her good, renders her a slave to her husband's decisions. What is interesting about this narrative structure is that it somewhat mirrors a process of colonization. While the first section creates an image of Antoinette as a helpless child and a social outcast who feels "not so safe" in a world that refuses to recognize her and robs her of a mother and brother (Rhys 57), the second section addresses the assumption that her English husband will save her from her child-like existence. Trying to coerce her into following through with the wedding, the husband says to her, "But don't you remember last night I told you that when you are my wife there would not be any more reason to be afraid?" (Rhys 78-79). Assuring her of her supposed safety with him, he says, "'You are safe,' I'd say. She'd liked that—to be told 'you are safe'" (Rhys 93). Perhaps reflecting the way in which the colonizing power changes and morphs the conquered group into an image more reflective of prescribed requirements, the third section depicts the aftermath of this "safety" of which her husband had assured her. In England, she becomes a type of slave locked away from view and labeled as someone she is not: Bertha. She says, "Names matter, like when he wouldn't call me Antoinette, and I saw Antoinette drifting out of the window with her scents, her pretty clothes, and her looking-glass" (Rhys 180). Instead of feeling safe, she cannot see who she is anymore and now relies on the memories of being a child and brushing her hair, while asking, "What am I doing in this place and who am I?" (Rhys

180). Her husband's destruction of her identity, changing her from Antoinette to Bertha, imprisoning her in an attic where she no longer knows who she is, results in the dismemberment of her being. Charting the loss of her identity, the novel's structure develops a narrative progression from tragic childhood and young adulthood to enslavement, her narrative interrupted and forever affected by the arrival of the English. As a woman with a mental illness, Antoinette is not "ideal" enough for her husband's world; because of her "real" problems, he locks her away from view.

Also using the marker of color to emphasize the horrifying reality of living under the rule of a white society determining the living conditions for a black existence, the novel seems to seek more intricate exploration of the white-designed perception of the levels of color distinction existing along the spectrum of black to white. For instance, Antoinette, though white, does not neatly fall into a category of being white because she is a Creole. Her husband says of her, "She never blinks at all it seems to me. Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either" (Rhys 67). Because Antoinette does not come from a place of prestige, her husband automatically makes a distinction between his white background and her white background, and suddenly even being "white" in and of itself is not enough to constitute being the color of privilege. When Antoinette had initially refused to marry him, he had thought, "I did not relish going back to England in the role of rejected suitor jilted by this Creole girl" (Rhys 78). Although his wife is white, he does not see her as a proper English woman and therefore all the more unequal to his own status. At the same time that he sees Antoinette as not being white enough, he also seems to position the servant Christophine at an interesting point along the black/white

spectrum. Of Christophine, he says, "I looked at her sharply but she seemed insignificant. She was blacker than most and her clothes, even the handkerchief round her head, were subdued in color" (Rhys 72). While Antoinette is not white enough, Christophine is too black for his level of comfort. Seeming to fear Christophine though calling her "insignificant," he asks Antoinette if she is afraid of Christophine and admits that if "she were taller…one of these strapping women dressed up to the nines, I might be afraid of her" (Rhys 74). Later, when Christophine brings him and Antoinette breakfast, he even describes her as "dressed up and looking very imposing" (Rhys 84). Moreover, he believes that she poisoned him and that she is worsening Antoinette's condition with her cures (Rhys 153-154). *Wide Sargasso Sea* depicts a world in which there are categories and subcategories that determine identity. Not only does color become a marker of identity, but also race serves as a classifying indicator. For Antoinette, being white in color is not enough to earn the respect of her English husband who classifies her as being "not English or European." On the other hand, the color of Christophine's "blacker" skin does not keep her from being a powerful force in the novel, a force that frightens the husband and makes him believe that she is capable of causing him harm and acting as an agent of evil against him and Antoinette. Darker skin makes the English man believe that his wife occupies a lesser level of existence, and blackness assumes the appearance of evil and fright in his mind. He cannot see Antoinette or Christophine as individuals; rather, he dismembers them into skins, each of a color darker and less "ideal" than his own. Neither woman is the "ideal" woman of grace, loveliness, and English customs he had imagined.

Like *Crick Crack Monkey* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jamaica Kincaid's novel

Lucy (1990) serves as another example of Hodge's argument that Caribbean novels bring to light the conflicting differences between Western culture and non-Western culture. In the novel, perceptions of whiteness and blackness once again become ways to distinguish the white "ideal" from the black "real." However, Kincaid's novel exposes flaws within the "ideal" façade. Lucy acts as a first-hand observer of a white family consisting of a husband, wife, and four children. Seeing photographs of them, Lucy describes them as "six yellow-haired heads of various sizes…bunched as if they were a bouquet of flowers tied together by an unseen string" (Kincaid 12). This "unseen string" keeping the family looking perfectly bound together is only one of the artificialities that Lucy notices about this family. For example, she observes the appearance of niceness the white people maintain in her company while noting the position of separation she occupies even within this presentation of niceness. She says, "How nice everyone was to me, though, saying that I should regard them as my family and make myself at home. I believed them to be sincere, for I knew that such a thing would not be said to a member of their real family" (Kincaid 7-8). She is not an actual member. She is a dis-member in the home of white people claiming to be her family. Within the white family structure, she notices problems, "real" problems that supposedly do not exist in the "ideal" structure. For instance, she observes a sense of artificiality in the marital relationship between Lewis and Mariah. Upon seeing Lewis kiss Mariah on the neck and Mariah in turn respond to the kiss with a shudder, Lucy says, "The whole thing had an air of untruth about it; they didn't mean to do what they were doing at all. It was a show—not for anyone else's benefit, but a show for each other. And how did I know this? I just could tell—that it was a show and not something

to be trusted" (Kincaid 47). Lucy's ability to pinpoint white artificiality rings true when she realizes the affair between Lewis and Dinah, seeing him kiss her in a situation that "was not a show…[but] something real" (Kincaid 79). Within the hypocritical structures of the "ideal" world, Lucy exposes the "something real."

In addition to superficiality, Lucy also comments on the general ignorance that whites possess of cultures outside of their own. For instance, when she tries to connect with Mariah and Lewis by telling them about a dream she had had, their reaction is to try to interpret her story from their own perspective. In response to her dream, "Lewis made a clucking noise, then said, Poor, poor Visitor. And Mariah said, Dr. Freud for Visitor" (Kincaid 15). While Lucy "had meant by telling them my dream that I had taken them in, because only people who were very important to me had ever shown up in my dreams," the white listeners immediately impose their own interpretations of dreams onto what she has said. Instead of asking her about what her dream means to her, they once again create a sense of separation between themselves and her, calling her a "poor Visitor" and thereby distancing her from the perspective they assume to be the only perspective. Similarly, Dinah likewise demonstrates an ignorance of cultures and geographical spheres outside of the one she occupies. She asks Lucy, "So you are from the islands?" (Kincaid 56). Resentful of Dinah's failure to realize that "islands" could cover a realm of geographical possibilities, Lucy thinks to herself, "Which islands exactly do you mean? The Hawaiian Islands? The islands that make up Indonesia or what?" (Kincaid 56). It is not just Dinah's generalized term of "islands" that appears to bother Lucy; rather, she wishes that Dinah could also "feel like a piece of nothing, which was the way she had made me feel in the first place" (Kincaid 56). Moreover,

Mariah does not realize how Dinah's comment had affected Lucy. Wanting Lucy to like Dinah, Mariah tells Lucy, "What I like the most about Dinah is how she embraces life" (Kincaid 57). To this comment, Lucy's responds, "Yes, you mean your life. She embraces your life" (Kincaid 57). Lucy's comment about Dinah encapsulates her overall observations of whites as people who interpret life as singularly a white life and view that white life from a completely white perspective. To the white people, anything different from white is outside the system. Lucy is automatically a "visitor." Mariah, while boasting of her "Indian blood" that supposedly makes her inherently "good at catching fish and hunting birds and roasting corn and doing all sorts of things," occupies a position of white superiority at the same time that she incorporates Indian inferiority into her white self and makes it just a part of her superior self (Kincaid 39-40). Lucy wonders, "How do you get to be the sort of victor who can claim to be the vanquished also?" (Kincaid 41). Her rather negative and revealing observations of white behavior lead to questions we could ask about white superiority in a real-world context: how can whites dominate a group of people and internalize them at the same time? Why is a white perspective assumed to be the universal perspective? These very "real" perceptions dismember individuals into white members or non-white outsiders. This perception of superiority makes "real" people "feel like a piece of nothing."

Novels are not the only manifestations of a dismembering perception grounded in the idea of whiteness as the bar against which everything else must be measured. In *Perceptions of Caribbean Women*, Brodber meticulously researches this tension, noting the printed depictions of black women in Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Those who adopt the appearance and mannerisms of

Western customs become associated with images of the "Ideal Woman," while those who do not speak the language of the oppressor tend to assume the image of the "Real Woman," the anti-ideal. Noting that colored women "were among the proprietors of guest houses in 19th century Barbados," as well as in Jamaica, Brodber cites comments, one from Alleyne's *Historic Bridgetown* and one from the *Daily Gleaner*, a Jamaican newspaper, that question the morality of these hotel owners, suggesting one owner to be "of questionable reputation" (Brodber, *Perceptions* 11) and another to be "of questionable morality" (Brodber, *Perceptions* 24). Pointing out this moral lack attributed to women of color, Brodber asserts, "Free coloured women were likely to be seen in this age as business women of shady characters, the antithesis of the supportive angel" who stayed home and waited for her white husband to greet her at the door (Broder, *Perceptions* 12). Providing an example of an advertisement for a black ex-slave woman, Brodber notes the perceived lack of morality apparent in the specific description: "Wanted—Female house servant; honest, discreet servant of all work" (Brodber, *Perceptions* 12). Implicit in the description is the assumption that such qualities would not automatically be present in prospective candidates.

In light of these written accounts from novels, newspapers, and advertisements portraying black women as debased creatures with a moral emptiness, it does not seem extraordinary that the white Mary-Alice would have termed the black Matilda "morally corrupt" for believing "in the pit of her stomach that Matilda was capable of what she herself admitted to doing" in terms of killing people (John 218). However, it is interesting to note that Mary-Alice's moral criticism of Matilda did not originate with the criminal allegations but instead with her conversation with Matilda regarding Iris.

After talking with Matilda, Mary-Alice had written a letter to her mother superior, informing her of Matilda's lack of participation in the plan to remove Iris from John Baptiste's clutches. Describing Matilda in unforgiving terms, Mary-Alice had written, "Regretfully, the woman people call Matilda, an Obeahwoman, has turned out to have no sense of morality. She is a woman of great vulgarity. She is shameless and depraved. She finds no fault with her fourteen-year-old child being kept by a man who could be her father" (John 107). Although the letter was never opened, Mary-Alice's words had clearly delineated her opinion of Matilda as a "morally corrupt" individual, and she had arrived at this "morally corrupt" verdict through one encounter with the woman.

"You based your opinion of her on what—I mean, how did you know her?" (John 217)— Teddy poses this question to Mary-Alice. In response to Teddy's inquiries on behalf of Lillian, Mary-Alice responds, "My opinion was based on the time I met her" (John 218). Recognizing *time* as a significant term in her statement, Teddy immediately clarifies what she means, asking, "'*The* time'? You mean, one time? You met her just once?" (John 218). According to Brodber's *Perceptions*, it is natural for human beings to arrive at conclusions about one another. At the very beginning of her study, she acknowledges, "Human beings in daily intercourse with each other need to and do form opinions and attitudes concerning one another. From these opinions and attitudes, images are formed, complete with a set of expectancies concerning role performance of the other" (Brodber, *Perceptions* 1). Nevertheless, Mary-Alice, after a one-time conversation with Matilda, had constructed strong "opinions and attitudes" that Brodber observes as arriving from "daily intercourse." Mary-Alice continues to describe to Teddy and Lillian her fervent belief in the opinion that Matilda was

"morally corrupt." Defending her testimony against Matilda, Mary-Alice says, "What I did was give my impression of her character. It was an honest impression, I was true to myself. I want you to understand that" (John 218). Based on one conversation at one particular moment in time, Mary-Alice had not only determined Matilda's moral state, but also had "remained fully convinced of the woman's guilt" since the time she had met her, *once* (John 218). Interestingly, while believing Matilda to be immoral, Mary-Alice describes her own impression as "honest" and "true," the very opposites of "questionable reputation," "questionable morality," or, in the case of Matilda, complete moral corruption.

It was Matilda's reaction to the news Mary-Alice had brought her concerning Iris that had permanently cemented in Mary-Alice's mind the moral state of the woman. Expecting Matilda to be distraught about Iris's affair with Baptiste, Mary-Alice had been appalled by Matilda's response to her daughter's sexual activities. Relating her remembrance of the event to Teddy and Lillian, Mary-Alice "searched for the word that would best translate her memories of Matilda's reaction. Acceptance, perhaps, that was there, but it was something more. *Approval*" (John 219). What kind of a mother could possibly support her child's affair with a man nearly twice her age? To this question, Mary-Alice had determined that only a "morally corrupt" one could be capable of such a response. In addition to her shock at Matilda's lack of horror regarding her daughter's situation, Mary-Alice had also taken offense to Matilda's lack of appreciation for the "sister of God" who had made the journey to find her (John 220). Instead of extending to Mary-Alice an open door and warm beverage, Matilda had simply come down the mountain. She "had not even done her the courtesy of inviting her back up to her home

when Mary-Alice had come so far to bring word of her daughter" (John 220).

Far from engaging in hospitable behavior, Matilda, according to Mary-Alice, "had treated her worse than one would have treated a donkey, she had not even offered her a drink of water, nor moved her out of the hot sun into the shade of a tree" (John 221). In contrast to Brodber's example of "ideal" female behavior that Abel Clinkett's newspaper in Barbados had published in the nineteenth century, which associated the "the finest pictures of female character…given by Edmund Burke of his own wife" with the traits of "good sense, goodness of heart, sweetness of manners and disposition" (Brodber, *Perceptions* 8), Matilda, from Mary-Alice's perspective, had demonstrated no "sweetness of manners" and certainly no "good sense" regarding Iris's relationship with Baptiste. Commenting on Clinkett's editorial choices, Brodber remarks, "Abel Clinkett in some part of his mind, saw women as supportive home-makers…This image he projected to his readers" (Brodber, *Perceptions* 8). However, unlike this "image of an angel waiting at home to serve its mate," Matilda exhibited no signs of saintly hospitality or the "manners" Mary-Alice certainly expected of a fellow woman. As Cecilia Green acknowledges in her article "A Recalcitrant Plantation Colony: Dominica, 1880-1946," "Rural women, especially prior to the 1930s, worked extremely hard, living lives as far removed from secluded or 'protected' domesticity as can be imagined" (Green 61). These women would not have had the opportunity to inhabit the domestic sphere or assume the role of the "angel" of the home.

Like Lady Nugent, Mary-Alice also took notice of Matilda's appearance and described it in less than flattering ways. Dismembering Matilda's appearance at the very moment that she first saw her, Mary-Alice had immediately formed an impression of

the woman's body. First, she had criticized Matilda's clothing, thinking to herself that the "big black woman…had come in everyday farming clothes to meet her…had not extended her the respect of dressing appropriately" (John 220). Instead, to Mary-Alice's criticism, Matilda "came with dirt under her nails and her head uncovered, sweat shining through the rows of her Congoed hair" (John 220). Second, Mary-Alice had observed the blackness of Matilda's skin when she had adjusted her garment. Even though she had come to Dominica to work with pregnant women, she had not seen black breasts before, and, thinking of Matilda's breasts as "the things that swung at her," she had contemplated "the powdery soot-black of the skin, the wide coal-black halos of prickled aureole, the thick rough pitch-black crowns of nipples, black on deeper black on denser black, each section impossibly darker than the one from which it arose" (John 222). Mary-Alice does not see Matilda as a whole person; rather, she sees her in pieces. From her dirty fingernails to her sweaty hair, Matilda flashes across Mary-Alice's mind as a series of parts.

In addition to demonstrating questions of moral purity surrounding the character of colored women, Brodber's research also comments on the issue of aesthetics raised by Lady Nugent. Unlike her remarks about "blackies" who could be "thick-lipped and ugly," Lady Nugent's comments about her own aesthetic appearance are positive, and Brodber addresses this association between fair skin and attractiveness. She provides an example of a short story published on the front page of the *Daily Gleaner*'s first issue. Of this story, titled "Excellent Ellen," Brodber notes, "Ellen is a lovely young lady, of 'pale delicate frame'" (Brodber, *Perceptions* 22). Such a story directly situates loveliness with paleness and leaves readers with the impression that to be "excellent" is

to possess those qualities. Mary-Alice's description of Matilda as "big" and "black" certainly does not conjure up images of those appearances akin to that of Excellent Ellen. From these observations, Mary-Alice, "a university-educated white woman" (John 105), had deduced that Matilda must be "morally corrupt" for not in any capacity showing her respect for Mary-Alice's position as the "sister of God" (John 220). Comparing her to other Dominican women, Mary-Alice had thought that "unlike every other Dominican…[she] had ever met, Matilda had looked at her with indifference, without deference, with no regard for her nun's habit" (John 221). Not only had Matilda failed to offer her guest the courtesy due a nun, but she had also revealed her breasts upon adjusting her *pagne* and stepped close enough to Mary-Alice for her breasts to contact Mary-Alice's cheek (John 222).

This only encounter with Matilda had formed the basis for the "opinion" of the woman's character that Mary-Alice would later declare at her trial. However, it is interesting to note that this "opinion" came through Mary-Alice's lens of sight and arose from Matilda's failure to meet the expectations Mary-Alice had brought with her to the mountain. If we consider Mary-Alice's criticisms of Matilda, we can recognize that each criticism comes with a pre-conceived notion of what Matilda ought to be doing or what Matilda ought to be saying. For example, her frustration with Matilda's "approval" of her daughter's relationship rests on the assumption that Iris was a fourteen-year-old child that Matilda had put up "for sale" (John 221). From Mary-Alice's point of view, Matilda had given a stamp of approval on a case of child molestation. However, Matilda had approached the situation from an economic point of view. Her interest in the case had concerned how John Baptiste would reimburse the

family for his relationship with her daughter. She "had expected gold, cloth, alcohol, and livestock from John Baptiste in exchange for her daughter" (John 220). Moreover, she had inquired about the well-being of her daughter, wondering if Baptiste had provided housing for her. In addition, she had shown distress regarding the news that her child was not attending the Catholic school. To say that Matilda was not interested in her daughter's welfare would be an inaccurate statement since Matilda had expressed that the news of her daughter's securing an older man to provide for her would be the "better for her" (John 220).

In *The Continent of Black Consciousness: On the History of the African Diaspora from Slavery to the Present Day*, Brodber demonstrates how black female relationships with white men from higher classes proved to be a way to improve economic status since the time of slavery. Unions between the varying classes that produced offspring could result in "automatic mobility out of the status of slave" (Brodber, *The Continent* 23). Although such relationships existed "outside of the purview of the law," white men did have "loving relationships with their enslaved mistresses and even manumitted their [illegitimate] children" (Brodber, *The Continent* 23). In *Perceptions*, Brodber references a comment made by a Mrs. Flannigan, author of *Antigua and the Antiguans*, regarding these unions (Brodber, *Perceptions* 19). According to Mrs. Flannigan, colored women would teach their daughters "that it was more honourable and praise-worthy to inhabit the harem of a white man, than to be the lawful wife of a man of colour" (Flannigan 180-1). Criticizing the women for this strategy, Mrs. Flannigan laments, "This conduct was, of course, the grave of all domestic peace, the destroyer of connubial love; and by its dire, its *demoniacal*

influences, caused the fairest island in the world to become, in a moral point of view, a dreary marsh, exhaling the poisonous miasma" (Flannigan 181). Her view of these relationships as "demoniacal" echoes Mary-Alice's view of Matilda's allowance of such measures as "morally corrupt," a view Mary-Alice had maintained in spite of expressing an understanding of the economic benefits produced by these types of unions. Before coming into contact with Matilda, Mary-Alice had told the other nuns at the convent, "It's a way out of poverty for the servants…They are not fools. A bastard son of a rich man will help his whole family" (John 58).

A union with John Baptiste provided a path of opportunity. While he was "not white…not black…[but] that wonderful hybrid, that special creation that dominated many of the Caribbean islands," he nevertheless stood as a product of the fact that the "French and the Spanish had exercised less self-control with their slave women than the British and spawned a new race of the privileged" (John 74). Possessing money, land, and an inheritance, Baptiste was the kind of individual who could dramatically improve Iris's financial status in spite of Mary-Alice's concern that he was "about to get married to a woman from his own class!" (John 221). From an economic standpoint, Baptiste, though not sending remuneration for Iris to Matilda, had already improved Iris's status at the time that Mary-Alice had gone to talk to Matilda by providing lodgings for her "in a one-room house on the outer bank of the narrow Roseau River, where from her window she had a clean view of the spot where her washerwomen neighbors stood in the shallow river among the stones, slapping clothes against rocks for a living all day long" (John 75). She did not work alongside these women washing clothes "for a living all day long"; rather, she had someone who was providing a home for her where she

could watch these women from a distance. The washerwomen had interpreted Iris's condition as a fortunate one because Baptiste was providing for his lover. After all, instead of "fuck[ing] her behind a tree, on the wet grass, in the bush," Baptiste had demonstrated an economic commitment to "do right by her: he had set her up in her own house for which he paid, and he came to her every evening and sometimes also at midday" (John 75). Recognizing the significance of her having been "chosen by a member of the Baptiste family for the honor of concubinage," these women had protected Iris from being taken back to the Lebanese community, and they had encouraged her to have a child with Baptiste because he could offer her and her children a "future that offered more than the beating of cloth against rock" (John 76). As the daughter of "rich parents in Texas" (John 105) who could easily procure "huge" checks from oil men for donations to her missionary work, Mary-Alice could not understand the benefits of such an arrangement. As Matilda had pointed out, Mary-Alice "would never understand" (John 223). In her letter to her mother superior, Mary-Alice had written, "Mother, I beg you to remove the child from her current life of abuse, which offers her no future" (John 107). While Baptiste could not offer the future Mary-Alice envisioned, he could offer a kind of future that elevated her to a position different from that occupied by the washerwomen.

Mary-Alice had gone to see Matilda on the premise that Matilda would and ought to see Iris's affair as problematic. She had believed Matilda should "come and take her back to where she belonged" (John 79). Matilda, operating under the realization that Iris could financially prosper from a relationship with an older man who had money, had not met Mary-Alice's pre-conceived interpretation of the situation,

formed before her discussion with Iris's mother. Moreover, Matilda had also failed to support Mary-Alice's view of Iris as a prostituted victim of sexual abuse. Instead, Matilda had asserted that perhaps for Iris "love would be that way" (John 219). Iris had been the one to pursue Baptiste after seeing him attend a wedding. Upon seeing him for the first time, she had fainted; the next time she saw him, she, determined to catch his attention, "smiled at him, the man she had fallen in love with on sight" (John 73). Although Baptiste is not necessarily a sympathetic character for immediately thinking about "what he would do to her, the bold little slut who had openly propositioned him" (John 73), Mary-Alice's conversation with Matilda reveals a criticism of Baptiste while at the same time it shows her failure to acknowledge Iris's emotional attachment to him and her agency in having pursued a man who had appeared desirable to her. Unlike the "vulgar, ugly, Scotch Sultan…about fifty, clumsy, ill made, and dirty…[with] a dingy, sallow-brown complexion, and only two yellow discoloured tusks, by way of teeth" whom Lady Nugent mentions in her observation of his "*chère amie*…a tall black woman" (Nugent 29), Baptiste was an attractive lover Iris "worshiped" (John 74). Instead of being an "old man…he was young and strong with the face of an angel…he was beautiful, sensual" (John 75). Mary-Alice herself had fallen for a lover at that time who was also a "muscular young man," for whom she had renounced her vows as a nun and married (John 105-6).

Nevertheless, Mary-Alice had not taken into account the "love" Iris was experiencing, the "love that was there for no reason, love that had no conversation, love that had no logic, love that you would die for," love that had made the washerwomen think of their own sexual encounters and the "kinds of sounds they used to make but no

longer could" (John 75). The sexual relationship between Iris and Baptiste was something that Mary-Alice "would never understand," for she had informed Matilda of her own daughter's age as a means of demonstrating Iris's status as a child and consequential unsuitability as a sexual partner. However, Mary-Alice's estimation of Iris as a child once again bears with it pre-conceived ideas of the border separating child from adult, child abuse from consensual intercourse. In *The Second Generation of Freemen in Jamaica*: *1907-1944*, Brodber points out that the age of fourteen, at least in Jamaica, did not carry with it connotations of childhood. Instead, children at the age of fourteen were "legally no longer children but 'young persons'" (Brodber, *The Second* 28). In a note on this passage, Brodber elaborates, "The age of fourteen in Jamaica is significant in Jamaican law as the point at which a human being becomes a young person. Labor statistics also use this age as the baseline for entry into the workforce" (Brodber, *The Second* 186). Moreover, researching case studies of this generation in Jamaica, Brodber notes two examples of twelve-year-old boys responsible for the welfare of their families (Brodber, *The Second* 29-30). Similarly, regarding working conditions for women in Dominica, Green comments on the "very early age" at which girls entered into "household and family service" and references a census in 1891 that indicated that "81 percent of all Dominican women and girls over ten years worked outside the home" (Green 59). Her acknowledgements of age demonstrate the adult responsibilities assumed by children at a young age and perhaps challenge Mary-Alice's insistence on viewing Iris as a child. Laws in Dominica regarding the age of consent also suggest that Mary-Alice's "sobbing" entreaty that "Iris is not a woman. She is a child" (John 221) may not be completely founded from a legal standpoint. In his article

"The Law of Rape and Criminal Law Administration with Special Reference to the Commonwealth Caribbean," P. K. Menon points out that, under the Criminal Law Amendment, Dominica, St. Christopher-Nevis, Anguilla, and the Virgin Islands utilized the age range of twelve years to fourteen years to delineate categories of age and to determine instances of rape and punishments for those offenses according to legislation through the 1960s (Menon 841-2). Moreover, Menon notes the law's provision of the possibility of defense available to those offenders who had cause to think the victim was at least fourteen years old (Menon 842). Although Matilda had acknowledged that Iris's sexuality came "earlier than usual," she nevertheless was fully aware of her age and believed that "when it happens, very little we can do about such things" (John 219).

Actuality

Refusing to acknowledge reality as experienced by Matilda and Iris, Mary-Alice would not view the situation from other perspectives that might contradict with what she already believed to be right before going to talk to Matilda. However, her view of the situation does not comprehensively portray the actual circumstances surrounding Iris's actions and Matilda's response to those actions. According to Brodber, "Actuality is one thing, perception another" (Brodber, *The Second* 85). Armed with a multiplicity of prior notions regarding Matilda and Iris, Mary-Alice had gone to find Matilda to approach her with a perception. In *The Continent of Black Consciousness*, Brodber specifically uses the word *perception* to refer to the pre-conceived notions of behavior that whites have historically maintained regarding black people. Regardless of whether or not these perceptions reflected truth, they became the foundation on which racial prejudice, discrimination, and even slavery itself could be justified. Tracing the

historical development of slavery and emancipation in Haiti, Jamaica, and the United States, Brodber argues that the battle for liberation against systems of racial discrimination rested not merely on the systems themselves, but on the perceptions that supported and justified the systems. She says, "Throughout this period, along with violent overthrow of the system and flight out of white dominated societies, our forefathers in all the areas and among all the colours as well as throughout the times of slavery and of freedom worked at a change of perception" (Brodber, *The Continent* 47).

For Brodber, the idea of political independence in terms of true liberation appears to remain an unfinished concept. In the first and second chapters from *The Continent of Black Consciousness: On the History of the African Diaspora from Slavery to the Present Day*, Brodber provides a detailed history of the reality of slavery on a world-wide scale. Although looking at enslavement in its various forms in multiple countries, she focuses on Jamaica as a particularly vivid example of the devastating consequences of the ideology of slavery imposed on a group of people, saying, that "our version of it was particularly virulent given the way in which we were pulled out of Africa and how we were incorporated into the receiving society and given the phenotypical distinctions between master group and enslaved group… [b]lack skin and woolly hair, where the master has white skin and straight hair" (Brodber, *The Continent* 24). She points out that this experience of slavery did not only entail physical and racial appropriation, but also emotional and ideological subjugation resulting from the "born to be slave" mentality enforced on the enslaved through biblical authority functioning as the "celebrated compendium of the word of God" and the inescapable structure of the system that remained entrenched in people's minds as "it was handed down from

generation to generation" (Brodber, *The Continent* 24). Political independence is not a completed project that magically ended "a period which involves enslavement as well as official emancipation" (Brodber, *The Continent* 47) or culminated in Jamaica's independence from Great Britain. Rather, Brodber's chapters demonstrate the residual effects of slavery and colonization that have lasted beyond governmental declarations decreeing so-called emancipation or independence on a political level, or, more accurately, on a level not extending past the paper on which they were written.

In Brodber's view, actual liberation from the system, a "curse and a state, which had no in-built end," should mean a change in and evaluation of perception of the self, a self that has been enslaved and colonized (Brodber, *The Continent* 24). She says, "The issue for us today is one of self-perception. The master may draw pictures of us, but do we believe those pictures? Did we/do we see ourselves as socially dead, as doomed to enslavement, as constitutionally the outsider, as without honour and therefore without the capacity to assume responsibility for our actions?" (Brodber, *The Continent* 24). Acknowledging that her forefathers realized that "liberation also had to mean an attack on the perception that they and others had of their possibilities" and therefore "worked at a change of perception" (Brodber, *The Continent* 47), Brodber, moving the discussion into the twentieth century, ponders what liberation should look like now. It seems that perception must continue to be at the center of the discussion. She says, "Do we…need liberation and, if so, what programmes do our situation require? These are the questions on which our history asks us to meditate" (Brodber, *The Continent* 47). She insinuates that the historical reality of colonization requires current generations to continue wondering what true liberation from perception must entail.

Overthrow of a system could produce a physical change in working conditions, but a change that addressed the perception that blacks were "incapable of being other than servants" proved necessary to altering the conceptual columns supporting the physical construction of the system (Brodber, *The Continent* 47). This change would have to confront "the perception that they and others had of their possibilities" (Brodber, *The Continent* 47), a perception that saw blacks as unequal in power (Brodber, *The Continent* 31), "landless labourers" (Brodber, *The Continent* 36), and poverty-stricken (Brodber, *The Continent* 37), among other things. After emancipation, negative perceptions of black "possibilities" persisted. In *The Second Generation*, Brodber discusses perceptions of black people as "ignorant" and "incapable of filling certain positions" (Brodber, *The Second* 11). Moreover, even after emancipation, whites did not perceive black men to be worthy of representation and instead "excluded [them] from this political system" (Brodber, *The Second* 13).

Although Mary-Alice had interacted with Matilda in a post-slavery context in Dominica in the 1940s, she had nevertheless approached Matilda with a similarly limited range of perceptual "possibilities" that consisted of her as a mother who would either remove Iris from Baptiste's influence or as a "morally corrupt" individual then for not seeing this situation from Mary-Alice's perspective. However, the question remains: why had Mary-Alice held so tenaciously to this perception of Matilda and Iris, people with whom she had only barely come into contact? Why would their situation matter so deeply to her? In the preface to his work *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, Winthrop Jordan discusses the framework with which he approached his study of white encounters of black people in the United States.

He notes that it was not until "the Revolutionary era [that] Americans suddenly came …to realize for the first time…that the institution which their ideology condemned was founded on perceptions of physiological differences" (Jordan, Preface xi). In the same way that slavery in America contradicted democratic ideals but remained embedded in society as Americans considered the role of blacks in a democratic society at the same time that they deemed them "inferior to white men" (Jordan, Preface xii), so Mary-Alice, who had come to Dominica to missionize, had ended up demonizing women, the group of people she had purportedly come to serve in "maternity clinics in the more remote villages" (John 58).

In looking for answers to how perception in America formed the basis of the treatment of blacks, Jordan puts forth a thought-provoking statement regarding the "need of transplanted Englishmen to know who it was they were" (Jordan, Preface xiv). He says, "For white men had to know who *they* were if they were to survive. They had to retain control of themselves and their liberties if they were to succeed in America" (Jordan, Preface xiv). Maintaining these controls for themselves meant excluding "Negroes from full participation in the white man's world" (Jordan, *White over Black* 123). In some ways, it would appear that Mary-Alice secured her own sense of identity and control by maintaining perceptions of Matilda and Iris that gave her purpose as a nun. Without people to missionize, what would be the point of the mission? Armed with the perception of Iris as a future sexual slave, Mary-Alice had taken the opportunity upon herself to secure Iris's place in the Lebanese community and performed "self-congratulatory prayers of thanks" for the role *she* had played in the girl's salvation (John 64). She even associates her perception of Matilda as "morally corrupt" with

being "true" to herself as she explains her side of the story to Teddy and Lillian in the present day (John 218). So many years removed from the situation, Mary-Alice still relates the question of Matilda's guilt to her own sense of self-worth, a consideration that really has nothing to do with Matilda's actual character.

In addition to locating self-identity as a factor in white perception, Jordan also references fear of power as another motivator. Discussing slavery in America, he says, "Because the colonists dreaded slave insurrections they were quick to excoriate persons they conceived to be potential fomenters of revolt. A chief source of danger, the colonists felt, was the Negro who was not a slave" (Jordan, *White over Black* 122). Systems keep people in line, and people who step outside of that system pose a threat. For the colonists, the threat of free blacks could manifest itself in an uprising in which "free Negroes would side not with their brethren in legal status but with their brethren in color" (Jordan, *White over Black* 123). Echoing a fear of black women, Lady Nugent's journal states the dangers of white men's affairs with women of color. She ascribes to these women what Brodber calls "a powerful influence over high ranking men" (Brodber, *The Continent* 27). She says that that the men "are almost entirely under the dominion of their mulatto favourites" (Nugent 98). This "dominion" could cause the men to engage in criminal behavior, prompting a Mr. Irvine to murder one of his servants who was having an affair with his own "favourite…brown lady" (Nugent 182). For their power over white men, Lady Nugent notes, "The ladies told me strange stories of the influence of the black and yellow women, and Mrs. Bullock called them serpents" (Nugent 12). Both powerful and fearful, these "serpents" posed a threat to the white women, who observed that these women of color could exert such power over

their white men. Brodber says, "Mrs. Bullock and her group had reason to categorize the mulatto females among our forefathers as a group and a frightening one: they felt their sting" (Brodber, *The Continent* 27). Lady Nugent does not distinguish among these women; rather, they function as a category, a category about which Lady Nugent and her fellow "white women share[d] a perception" (Brodber, *The Continent* 27).

Before meeting Matilda, Mary-Alice had formed perceptions of Dominican women as a group. When she had told her fellow nuns about the unions of black women and white men, she had said, "They've been doing it since slavery" (John 58). She did not qualify this statement; instead, her general suggestion is that this behavior is a characteristic that defines who *they* are. Moreover, she had the perception that the washerwomen who had protected Iris from her Lebanese employer would recognize Mary-Alice as a religious figure and quickly hand over Iris to her just upon seeing her dressed in her nun's attire (John 108). Planning her trip to retrieve Iris, Mary-Alice had believed her own pregnancy would contribute to the respect she would receive. She had thought that the "washerwomen would see her not just as the Mother of God but also as his Bride—and what power, what potency she would have at her disposal. It would not be scandalous at all to those women, who, like the people in the time of Mary, could easily ignore the question of paternity in order to focus fully on the miracle of motherhood" (John 108). Although not having encountered the washerwomen, she nevertheless perceived that in the anticipated meeting with them she would have "power" and "potency" over them. *Those* women who procreated with men for economic advantages would not "question" her status as a saintly mother.

Acting unlike the Dominican woman whom Mary-Alice expected to show her

religious reverence and awe, the woman who "would have attired herself in traditional *douillet*, draping a section of her skirt over an arm as she approached so she would see that the woman had worn her best hand-embroidered cutwork cotton petticoats underneath in her honor, the lace eyelets threaded with red ribbon" (John 220), Matilda had not conformed to the perception Mary-Alice had of her. She had stepped outside of the realm of expectations underlining Mary-Alice's perception of the behaviors that should be characteristic of the group to which she belonged. Matilda's failure to support her perception had caused Mary-Alice to feel fearful. Upon seeing the blackness of Matilda's breasts, Mary-Alice had felt "threatened"; the woman's unexpected behavior "had deeply stirred her to fear. She wanted to step away but could not" (John 222). Once Matilda's breasts had directly come into contact with her face, "her black nipples like fingers pointing down at Mary-Alice," it had been impossible for the nun to process such a direct assault on not only her status as a nun, but also as a person (John 223). Telling her story to Teddy and Lillian, Mary Alice recalls that she was "sitting on her heels in the dirt with her shaking hands covering her cheeks" (John 223). She had carried her fear of Matilda even into Lillian's baptism, wondering what Matilda could do about her and Icilma's efforts to baptize Lillian in a Catholic ceremony, recognizing that "her status as a former nun carried no weight against Matilda and whatever she was able to do from her grave" (John 202). If Matilda were convicted for what Mary-Alice believed to be her crimes, she would no longer pose a threat against perception; she would no longer be capable of the "possibility" of killing people, an act she herself had admitted to doing.

All Mary-Alice had said was, "I found her to be morally corrupt" (John 218).

Mary-Alice tells Teddy that those words could not have been responsible for Matilda's conviction. After all, she had not done anything except give "an honest impression" of Matilda's character; however, that impression was exactly the problem. Her perception had not allowed for the "possibility" that Matilda was "not a murderer," but a *magistrat,* a judge of the Council of Noir (John 287). She had not taken the *time* to realize that the woman so unconcerned with her daughter's welfare "had planned her legitimate vengeance [on Baptiste], with the full support of each citizen of Noir" (John 270). It had never occurred to her that the bodies Matilda had supposedly killed were those of the villagers who had committed suicide after burning down Noir (John 288). Mary-Alice had not considered that Matilda, along with the citizenry of Noir, had devised a plan involving Obeah to kill John Baptiste out of justice for Iris. Matilda had known that Baptiste's mother-in-law, Mrs. Richard, had dismembered Iris in an unthinkable way. To punish Iris for having an affair with her son-in-law and publicly humiliating her own daughter, Mrs. Richard had engaged in actions Matilda refused to ignore. Iris, the "Real Woman," the woman looking for social mobility and financial protection from a man whom she loved and wanted for herself, had embarrassed Mrs. Richard and her daughter. She had disrobed John Baptiste's wife and stood in the middle of the street with "his wife's swollen, milk-dripping breasts springing out from between Iris's hands" (John 116). Mrs. Richard, an "Ideal Woman" with servants, money, and a plan, takes vengeance into her own hands. She sees Iris as an inferior woman who had humiliated her child, who had initiated the "disgrace of her daughter—of her entire family" (John 117). This woman, the mother-in-law of Iris's lover, had brought a glass bottle to Iris's room. Iris "had seen what came out of the purse, and she knew what it

was for" (John 120). She watched as Mrs. Richard began attempting to break the bottle for its intended purpose. Soon,

> Mrs. Richard found what she needed, Iris's enamel chamber pot. It was a graceful movement, a single, fluid sweep of arm that came from high and went down low to break the bottle near the floor. Her whole body swung down, following her arm, and then she rose up in an easy pivot to align herself with the place where Iris lay on her bride's gift bed, knees pinned down to the sides of her chest. And then it stopped being graceful as Mrs. Richard planted the jagged end of the [glass] bottle as far up into Iris as her hand would go. And then again, and then again. Until finally her hand came out empty, covered with blood midway to her elbow. (John 121)

Since Mary-Alice's perception did not allow for such things, she "would never understand." Mary-Alice would have never perceived Matilda's confession to murder to be the result of her belief that she was helping her daughter. After all, Mary-Alice's perception had ultimately killed Matilda, severing her spinal cord in a hanging fit for the criminal she had believed she was. Matilda had ensured that "the life of John Baptiste had been exchanged for the destroyed spirit of her child" (John 273); nevertheless, she knew that this exchange would not change what had happened to Iris. As the executioner came to end her life, Matilda had thought that "she was only a woman with healing hands, able to do nothing more for her daughter; but as an ancestor, she would finally have the kind of power they'd always believed she owned. She offered the man her neck" (John 273). Despite the perception that would ultimately

dismember her body, cutting life from death, severing neck from body, Matilda would avenge her daughter's "real" dismemberment at the hands of the "ideal" woman.

Chapter 5: Dismembering and Re-membering

> I don't believe I would be alive today if it hadn't been for writing. There were times when I was conscious of holding onto a pen and letting the words flow, painful and from the gut, to keep from letting go of it all. Now, this was when I was much younger, and full of self-hatred. Writing helped me give voice to turn around a terrible silence that was killing me. And on a larger level, if we, as Indian people, Indian women, keep silent, then we will disappear, at least in this level of reality. As Audre Lorde says, also, "Your silence will not protect you," which has been a quietly unanimous decision it seems, this last century with Indian people.[17]

A woman's body appears on the screen. The dismembered remains lie on the border between Mexico and the United States. Cut in half, the top portion of the body belongs to a female American judge and the bottom section to a Mexican woman. The judge's body lies in El Paso, Texas; the other woman's body remains on the Mexican side of the border in Cuidad Juárez, Chihuahua. The lower half of the Mexican woman's body becomes part of another criminal investigation involving the brutal dismemberment of twenty-three bodies located at a particular house in Mexico. This scene depicting one body, halved along two borders, serves as the premise for the first episode of *The Bridge*, a television show that premiered on the FX cable channel in

[17] Harjo, Joy. *The Spiral of Memory: Interviews*. Ed. Laura Coltelli. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996. Print.

2013.[18] As the detectives in the program work to uncover the identity of the murderer, the bifurcated corpse continues to serve as a basis for questions that must be answered: is the killer making a particular statement? Is the body representative of something? Where are the other sections of each woman? As the mystery unfolds, this female body continues to serve as the site onto which the investigation projects possible hypotheses. In the fictional world of televised dramas, such violence against women contributes to the thrilling plot for a murder mystery. Outside of the television screen, mutilation of women's bodies is no mere plot line for a good story: it is a reality. Women's bodies often become the centerpieces of violence across a national, cultural, patriarchal landscape. Violence is a horrific reality, particularly for women of color. For instance, in *Half the Sky* (2009), Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn discuss the regular occurrence of honor killings in various cultures and estimate that at least 6,000 honor killings occur each year (Kristof and WuDunn 82). Kristof and WuDunn provide the example of Du'a Aswad, a girl from Iraq, who was killed by her family and the religious leaders of her village for presumably having sex before she was married (Kristof and WuDunn 82). Though her family members did not know for certain if Du'a Aswad had engaged in premarital sex, they nevertheless condemned her for her supposed sin, ripped her skirt off of her body, and stoned her to death (Kristof and WuDunn 82). After Du'a was dead, some of the men who had stoned her covered the lower half of her body (Kistof and WuDunn 82). By killing her, the family maintained some sense of control over the preservation of the girl's purity and then clothed her once again after the shame had been removed. Strangely, this particular ethnic group's

[18]"Pilot." *The Bridge: The Complete First Season*. Writ. Hans Rosenfeldt, Mans Marlind, Bjorn Stein, Meredith Stiehm, and Elwood Reid. Dir. Gerardo Naranjo. 21st Century Fox, 2014. DVD.

devotion to the iconography of women allowed them to judge the sexual purity of the girl's physical body as more valuable than her life. Du'a's family preferred to end a woman's life rather than see a woman live in an undefiled state.

Moreover, in the nationalist discourses of patriarchal societies that determine nationalism through the purity of women, the idealization of women and of their chastity marks the division between "our" women and "their" women (Littlewood 9). While one group of people may idealize the women of their own culture as the mothers guarding the motherland, or home front, this group does not necessarily idealize the women of any other culture in the same manner. Instead, the women of other groups become the bodies on which the identity of one culture can be exalted at the same time that the identity of another culture can be eradicated. For example, Mukhtar Mai, a woman from a village in southern Punjab, served as the body used by upper-caste Mastoi men to assert the collective identity of their group while degrading the identity of the lower-caste group to which Mukhtar's family belongs (Kristof and WuDunn 70). To punish Mukhtar's brother Shakur for his alleged sexual relations with a Mastoi girl (though Shakur was raped by the Mastoi men and did not rape a Mastoi girl), the Mastoi-dominated tribal assembly decided that Mukhtar would be gang-raped (Kristof and WuDunn 70). For a crime she never committed, Mukhtar suffered the punishment because her body functioned as the ideal site on which the Mastoi class could humiliate and denigrate Mukhtar's family. Raping her symbolized the rape of her entire culture and exemplified the Mastoi dominance over her class. As the case of Mukhtar demonstrates, the symbolism of enemy women as the repositories of culture to be conquered and subdued can be just as strong during any kind of cultural conflict

between groups as it can for groups whose idealization of their women symbolizes their collective identity and gives them a sense of nationalism (Saigol 13). Women like Mukhtar have often become the bodies on which two sides have staged their battles, even if the women were not directly involved in the conflict. One stunning example of the use of women's bodies as a political tool is mass rape. For example, the Partition of India was a brutal time of persecution for women that left women of opposing groups raped, mutilated, and abducted (Saigol 14). During the Partition, women were disfigured in numerous ways, including the branding of genitalia and breasts with nationalist slogans, the amputation of breasts, and the slicing of wombs so that women could no longer give birth to enemy children (Saigol 14). Though the Partition was one of the most violent and grotesque persecutions of women in world history (Saigol 14), it was certainly not the only occasion where women bore the physical brunt of a battle. In the Vietnam War, American soldiers raped Vietnamese girls and then left the military insignia of the United States in the open legs of the girls to serve as a reminder of American dominance (Littlewood 10). Even in present-day conflicts, rape and the persecution of women are still considered effective weapons. In the eastern Congo, "the world capital of rape," rape is not just *a* weapon of war; it is *the* weapon of war (Kristof and WuDunn 84). To this day, militias in this area continue to terrorize citizens through raping girls as young as three years old and then puncturing their vaginas with knives, bayonets, or guns (Kristof and WuDunn 84). These rapes leave lifetime scars not only on the bodies of their victims, but also on the citizenry as a whole. Raping and mutilating women of all ages and leaving them scarred and forcibly sterilized, the militias are able to assert their male dominance over the Congo citizenry through

attacking the organs that define female sexuality. Mukhtar Mai, a real-life woman who experienced gang rape first-hand, described the humiliation of rape, saying, "They [the rapists] don't even need to use their weapons. Rape kills her" (Kristof and WuDunn 70).

Rape, murder, mutilation—violence against women continues to pervade current conversations all over the globe. In addition to the horror that women from various cultures and backgrounds experience each day, the horrific state of murder and violence against women just in the city of Juárez alone is incredible. In "Murder in Juárez," Jessica Livingston notes reports dating back to 1993 revealing incredible violence against women in Juárez, listing numbers of murder cases to be in the three hundreds and more (Livingston 59). While the instances of murders are staggering, so are the figures for violence in general. In 1998 alone, "women in Juárez reported over eight hundred cases of rape and over nine thousand cases of violence, including rape, kidnapping, and domestic violence" (Livingston 59). In her article "Voices without Echo: The Global Gendered Apartheid," Rosa Linda Fregoso describes the horrifying realities of the gruesome state in which these women are found in Juárez. She elaborates on the unbelievable desecration of the bodies, saying, "[M]any have been tortured and sexually violated: raped, strangled or gagged, mutilated, with nipples and breasts cut off, buttocks lacerated like cattle, or penetrated with objects. Some bodies are beyond recognition, so disfigured and decomposed no one can identify them nor claim them" (Fregoso 137). She also notes that the victims of this cruelty are typically "women [who]…are poor…[and] dark" (Fregoso 137). Statistical evidence supports Fregoso's observations, showing that victims of violence "are most frequently women, with poor women and women of color disproportionately represented"; for example, reports

indicate that "the rape victimization rate for women of color, 330 for every 100,000 people, was considerably higher than that for white women, which stood at 90 for every 100,000" (Carraway 1303). In the 2011 article "Necropolitics, Narcopolitics, and Femicide: Gendered Violence on the Mexico-U.S. Border," Melissa Wright reports that violence in Juárez has not declined; instead, activity of the drug cartels has continued to make Juárez a site of incredible violence. Wright laments, "Nearly two decades later [since 1993], the city's infamy as a place of femicide is giving way to another terrible reputation. Since 2006, more than six thousand people have died in the city, and more than twenty-eight thousand across the country" (Wright 707-708).

However, the mutilation and dismemberment of women's bodies are not always confined to physical experiences. As G. Chezia Carraway argues in her article "Violence against Women of Color," violence against these women takes many often overlooked forms, such as, "economic violence, cultural violence, legislative violence, medical violence, spiritual violence, emotional violence, and educational violence" (Carraway 1305-6). All of these forms of violence affect a woman's body and its particular members. Violence of any kind can destroy a woman's "integrity" as a whole being with a mind, body, identity, and existence. In this sense, the violence particularly directed against the "dark-skinned woman" becomes a statement made not just against one woman's body, but against the cultural group to which that woman belongs. As Danizete Martinez argues in "Dismemberment in the Chicana/o Body Politic," violence against the body is not confined to the individual space occupied by that body for the Chicana/o; instead, it is a direct assault on the identity of the people. She says that threats of "aberrations to the integrity of the physical body" in turn function as threats to

the "real and imagined corporeal integrity of the Chicana/o body politic" (Martinez 38) and fall "within the larger framework of Chicana/o cultural discourse" (Martinez 39). Thus, the alarming cases of violence against women of color should become a necessary area to address within cultural studies. How is it possible to consider the violence against a group of people without pausing to realize the horrors specifically committed against women? Dismembered, violated, penetrated—these female victims of violence bear wounds committed directly in the flesh of their bodies and deserve attention for the incredible atrocities they continue to face on an everyday basis.

In her seminal work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa also comments on the bodily conditions historically suffered by the woman of color, particularly the indigenous woman. She says, "The dark-skinned woman has been silenced, gagged, caged, bound into servitude with marriage, bludgeoned for 300 years, sterilized and castrated in the twentieth century" (Anzaldúa 44). In her 1994 book of poems, *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*, Joy Harjo also comments on this violence suffered by indigenous people. After her prose poem, "A Postcolonial Tale," Harjo includes a succeeding passage in which she laments what a postcolonial world looks like for indigenous people. In this passage, she states, "The landscape of the late twentieth century is littered with bodies of our relatives. Native peoples in this country were 100 percent of the population a few hundred years ago. We are now one half of 1 percent. Violence is a prevalent theme in the history of this land" (Harjo, *The Woman* 19). These realities demonstrate the monstrous tragedy of violence affecting women in real-life situations and support Anzaldúa's assertion in *Borderlands* that the "world is not a safe place to live in" (Anzaldúa 42). Leslie Marmon Silko's 1991 work

Almanac of the Dead and Denise Chávez's 1994 novel *Face of an Angel* both show how unsafe the world can be for indigenous women, demonstrating the horrifying extent to which perpetrators of violence go to mark a body. Victims of violence in these novels bear scars, damage, and memories. However, as Cherríe Moraga asserts in *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness*, it is possible for the "violation of the collective body…[to be] re-membered" through re-appropriating what has been lost (Moraga 39). A body needing to be "re-membered" into its various parts or reassembled into its previous state suggests that it has first undergone the dismemberment that has rendered it broken, and Silko and Chávez certainly depict a broken body. They dismember the female body themselves to show how women, in spite of the external and internal forces that would seek to tear them apart, can and do survive the multiple forms of violence they face.

Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* envisions the most unthinkable dimensions of an unsafe world. Weaving together stories and events that take place in both North America and South America, the pages of her *Almanac* drip with blood. For example, in the novel, a handicapped man named Trigg runs a company called Bio-Materials, which specializes in the sale of blood, plasma, "fetal-brain material, human kidneys, hearts and lungs, corneas for eye transplants, and human skin for burn victims" (Silko 398). He acquires these materials from unsuspecting victims, usually homeless people whom he bleeds "to death pint by pint," and refers to these involuntary organ donors as "human debris" (Silko 444). At another point in the novel, a character named Beaufrey murders a baby boy, the son of Seese, a drug addict, and David, one of Beaufrey's lovers. Sexually aroused by death, Beaufrey not only possesses "videotapes and enlarged color

photographs of autopsies and organ harvests of Caucasian infants," but also adds an image of David's dead son to his collection (Silko 563). In addition to organ harvests, images of dismembered bodies bereft of blood and tissue continue to permeate the novel as Calabazas, a Yaqui Indian from Mexico, tells the story of the Yaqui people and the violence they suffered at the hands of the Spanish and Portuguese. He laments the suffering of his people, particularly the women and children, saying:

> Hitler got all he knew from the Spanish and Portuguese invaders. De Guzman was the first to make lamp shades out of human skin. They just weren't electric lamps, that's all. De Guzman enjoyed sitting Indian women down on sharp-pointed sticks, then piling leather sacks of silver on their laps until the sticks poked right up their guts. In no time the Europeans wiped out millions of Indians. In 1902, the federals are lining Yaqui women, their little children, on the edge of an arroyo. The soldiers fire randomly. Laugh when a child topples backwards…Human bones piled high. Skulls piled and stacked like melons. (Silko 216)

Decimation at the hands of Europeans colors the pages of Silko's *Almanac*. Her characters descend from a history of incredible violence through colonization and invasion. Like Calabazas, who remembers the horrors of European domination, Lecha also reminisces about Yoeme's story of the survival of the almanac, a story which in and of itself involves bloodshed and violence against a female body. In the first section of the novel, called "The United States of America," Lecha remembers how Yoeme, her grandmother, had told her about the people in the South, the people being destroyed by European invaders. Wanting to preserve their stories, the tribes of the South had

decided to send pages of their almanac with four young children, three girls and one boy, who might be able to reach safety in the North. Along their journey, the children had seen "severed arms and heads…in a lake near their home in the South" (Silko 248); they had seen the Butcher, who "had starved and slaughtered their people" (Silko 250). Coming upon an old woman, crippled and alone, the children had believed they had found a safe place in an unsafe world. Thinking that the woman welcomed their presence, the children had thought, "She seemed so happy to have them. She must have been alone a long time. Here was a place they might stay awhile" (Silko 248). However, one of the younger girls had not escaped unscathed from the woman's lair. Although the almanac's pages, made of skin, had initially saved the children from the woman, who "would have murdered them all right then, while the children were weak from hunger and the longer journey" (Silko 253), the younger girl had refused to depart from the woman's home with the others. Brimming with confidence and bleeding with her first menstruation, the young girl, killed by the woman who carried the mark of the Death-Eye Dog epoch, remained behind, "hanging from the cross-beams of the roof" (Silko 252).

Besides murder, sexual violence, particularly in the form of molestation, haunts *Almanac*, as well as *Face of an Angel*. In *Almanac*, Lecha reveals that Uncle Federico molested her and her twin sister, using the excuse, "I studied at the seminary for the priesthood, as you know…Sister Josefa has had you girls study the catechism, hasn't she? You know the importance of your purity, your virginity, then. Yes? Well, my little dove, I am only watching out for it, a simple checkup. I am a doctor you know, I understand the human body" (Silko 585). Upon realizing that the uncles of other girls

their age did not perform such operations, Lecha and Zeta had known that something was wrong. Similarly, Soveida Dosmantes in *Face of an Angel* begins her story by outlining her family history, part of which involves her biological father Luardo and his molestation of his niece and daughter. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection,* Julia Kristeva, building on Freud's theories regarding the ultimate social taboos, which consist of murder and incest, argues that religion is one mechanism by which the prohibition against incest remains in place in a social context. While one component of the sacred is "founded by murder and the social bond made up of murder's guilt-ridden atonement," the second concerns the preservation of the relationship between subject and object (Kristeva 57-8). She says, "A whole facet of the sacred, true lining of the sacrificial, compulsive, and paranoid side of religions, assumes the task of warding off that danger" associated with the consequences of committing a prohibited action (Kristeva 64). Although Luardo "wasn't a man who ever had faith" (Chávez 402), Uncle Federico vocalizes his knowledge of Catholicism, lecturing Zeta and Lecha about the importance of the catechism, their purity, and their confessions to father Lopez (Silko 586). For Uncle Federico, religion does not function as a prohibitive measure, as Kristeva imagines it for society as a whole; instead, he uses religion as a means to check, not his own actions, but those of his nieces. Religion becomes a way for him to control *their* purity and to remind his nieces of *their* transgressions. After the girls' supposed confessions, Uncle Federico says, "Ah, my dear! All cleansed of sin. Yes. Come inside…Lie down in here for a little nap…Take off your dress. Don't wrinkle it!" (Silko 586). Uncle Federico then proceeds to dismember the girls' bodies, forcing his fingers through their vaginas. Exploring their bodies for his own sexual pleasure, he

leaves them with mental scars that will haunt them for the rest of their lives.

Telling his nieces that they must preserve their purity and virginity and remain "cleansed of sin" suggests that not doing so would constitute an opposite state: impure, defiled, and uncleansed. Kristeva posits that the idea of defilement is one of the foundational elements of the work of religion. She says that "secular 'filth,' which has become sacred 'defilement,' is the *excluded* on the basis of which religious prohibition is made up…religious rites are purification rites whose function is to separate this or that social, sexual, or age group from another one, by means of prohibiting a filthy, defiling element" (Kristeva 65). From a discussion of defilement, the question then arises: how does the female body become the site of this impurity? How can Uncle Federico, a man molesting his nieces, profess to be more concerned with the cleanliness of their bodies than his own? Examining the issue of defilement within a patriarchal system, Kristeva suggests that the female body itself symbolizes religion's response to that which is unclean. She says that "setting up the rite of defilement takes on the function of the hyphen, the virgule" (Kristeva 74). In *Face of an Angel*, Soveida similarly wrestles with the issue of defilement, struggling to understand the Catholic Church's view of the female body. She remembers being in sixth grade at Holy Angel Elementary School and going to the Grand Theater during a field trip. A particular movie preview depicted "oily, bare-breasted women, their high pointy breasts straining under black leather vests" (Chávez 64). In reaction to this preview, the nuns had exclaimed to the children, "Close your eyes! Close your eyes! Close your eyes! Don't look!" and had begun reciting the Lord's Prayer (Chávez 64-5). Soveida remembers that, as the boys "snickered," the "girls winced in shame" (Chávez 65). They were not

supposed to look at such images of "women up there, women like us, women we someday would become, with breasts like that" (Chávez 65). The image of the women on the screen becomes a site of shame for the girls who feel that they should not gaze upon projections of women on the screen. The nuns quickly gasp at the sight of a female body and encourage the young girls to cast their eyes far away from such an image. Moreover, the nuns conflate shame and religion, immediately treating the presence of these images as an instance of sin.

Soveida's reference to the "shame" felt by the girls as they saw images of their future selves and "strained, guiltily, to sneak looks" (Chávez 65) echoes Castillo's criticism in *Massacre of the Dreamers: Essays on Xicanisma* of the "sense of shame, regret, [and] violation" associated with women's bodies and female expressions of sexuality (Castillo 141). Looking at the propagation of the idea "that sex is an unforgivable crime against divine mandates," Castillo points to the Catholic Church as an instigator and regulator of the female body (Castillo 141). In the same way that the Catholic Church condoned the "violence of European colonization and enslavement of primal peoples," so it also has sustained patriarchal conventions of the appropriation of women's bodies through its enforcement of "female sexual oppression" (Castillo 128). Kristeva echoes this criticism of the patriarchy, arguing that shame regarding the body is a gendered experience. She asserts,

> A split seems to have set in between, on the one hand, the body's territory where an authority without guilt prevails, a kind of fusion between mother and nature, and on the other hand, a totally different universe of socially signifying performances where embarrassment,

> shame, guilt, desire, etc. come into play—the order of the phallus. (Kristeva 74).

This "order of the phallus" is an order of the "embarrassment, shame, [and] guilt" Soveida experiences as a young girl in the Church. Moreover, as Soveida discovers, the Church provides limited outlets for dealing with the shame she faces. Not only do models for ideal female behavior, embodied in the role of female saints, earn their saintly status "by repudiating sex," but they also encourage women to believe that death itself is preferable to defilement of one's body (Castillo 129), whether that be defilement through a woman's masturbation (Castillo 122) or through rape, which, after all, the true female saint would forgive (Castillo 129).

Facing the regulation of the Church, Soveida tries to navigate through the paths of possibilities open to interpreting her own body. On one hand, she attempts to align herself with these models of female saints discussed by Castillo. She says, "I have always identified with saints. Particularly martyrs, young women who choose Christ as their sole spouse, women who would rather have their breasts ripped off them than betray their chastity" (Chávez 54). As a child, because of a book in school she had read, she had identified with Maria Goretti, a girl who had been raped and killed. Part of a children's book series, *Lives of the Saints*, the story of Maria Goretti had been her "introduction to passion…because it dealt with that secret, unapproachable world of sex, and crimes against the very core of one's self" (Chávez 55). This story had taught its young readers to protect their chastity at all costs and to view men as in need of "redemption," for Maria's murderer finds rest in the Pope's garden as a caretaker of the roses (Chávez 54-5). Moreover, this story had had an impact on Soveida's life, leaving

her with a model she believed she should strive to emulate. By the age of twelve, the young Soveida was already wrestling with the expectations of what her body should be, of who she should be. In a story of her own, she had written, "Somedays I want to be a saint or an angel or even the Blessed Virgin. Other days I just want to be Me" (Chávez 77). Even as a child, Soveida had recognized the limited choice placed before her: "[s]aint or sinner" (Chávez 77). In Anzaldúa's terminology, this division is the "*puta/virgin* dichotomy," a binary the female must "unlearn" (Anzaldúa 106).

Objection and Abjection

At the same time that the woman represents defilement of the ideal organ through her lack, she also becomes central to the order of language. As Laura Mulvey suggests in her discussion of psychoanalysis in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, the "function of woman in forming the patriarchal unconscious is twofold: she firstly symbolizes the castration threat by her real lack of a penis and secondly thereby raises her child into the symbolic" (Mulvey, *Visual* 14). If the female indeed becomes the "bearer of the bleeding wound" (Mulvey, *Visual* 15) and disrupts a primary narcissism, forcing it to recognize a distinction between self, or the subject, and the other, or the object (Kristeva 62-3), then we must consider why the male wants so strongly that object thrusting upon him self-recognition. Commenting on Freud's definition of scopophilia, or "pleasure in looking," Mulvey discusses visual stimulants as sources of pleasure since "scopophilia is one of the component instincts of sexuality" (Mulvey, *Visual* 16-17). Mulvey acknowledges the fact that visual images can indeed produce feelings of sexual pleasure, which, according to Freud, arise from the idea that "certain intermediate relations to the sexual object, such as touching and looking at it […] lie on

the road towards copulation and are recognized as being preliminary sexual aims" (*Three Essays*, 7: 195). Visual attraction to the female body and particularly to the female breasts pervades both *Almanac* and *Face* as male characters display admiration for the body. Both Uncle Federico and Luardo look upon women with a desire for their bodies. For instance, Lecha remembers a particular trip to a small store when she and Zeta had been "aware of how Uncle Federico was staring at their breasts" (Silko 585). Likewise, describing Luardo's desire for very young women, Soveida says, "In his sweetest dreams Luardo Dosamantes was making love…The sweetest part of the dream was where he suckled the offered breasts. Breasts of all kinds. At times the breasts were voluptuous and dark. Sometimes they were the small, childlike buds of a little girl who was unafraid of him" (Chávez 13). He had looked forward to these dreams, where he could revisit the "breasts of all the women he had made love to in his fifty-going-on-sixty years" (Chávez 14). In these sweet dreams, breasts had been inviting, "young or ample—always delicious" (Chávez 14).

Moreover, Luardo "liked her [his wife Delores] from the beginning" for her breasts, which he referred to as her "two strong points" (Chávez 19). In *Almanac*, Menardo immediately finds himself attracted to those breasts belonging to Alegría, the young architect responsible for building the home of his dreams. His "eyes darted furtively over her body, ready to dart back to her eyes whenever she looked away from the big window…He had narrowly escaped her eyes catching his on her breasts" (Silko 267). Ana Castillo addresses the glorification of the female breast itself in *Massacre of the Dreamers*. In the essay "La Macha: Toward an Erotic Whole Self," she acknowledges this male objectification of the female breast and desire for its "ample"

size. She argues that "women's breasts are erogenous (for the woman and her partner), but for men their size becomes of exaggerated importance" (Castillo 127). The female breast therefore becomes a representation of the way in which "men desire women: through the objectification of the body, the intense importance placed on youth, and the proportion and size of physical endowment" (Castillo 128). Thus, fulfilling his own sexual desires buried in the realm of "the unconscious through dreams and the imagination," a realm which Anzaldúa argues is still a manifestation of a "mode of consciousness," albeit a "mode" rejected by Western interpretations for being lower or inferior to "the higher mode of consciousness—rationality" (Anzaldúa 59), Luardo maintains an awareness of "knowing he was both asleep and awake to ecstasy at these times" and fantasizes the breast in its youthful, sustainable form as a representation of his own life measured by "the breasts of all the women he had made love to" (Chávez 14). For him, the breast as a member of the female body simultaneously signals conquest of the desired organ and comfort in its physical adherence to the grandiose proportions demanded of it (Castillo 128).

However, Mulvey points out that Freud's theory of scopophilia does not merely end at the hope of copulation or the fulfilment of sexual desires through viewing the breasts or other female members. Instead, there is another important dimension to scopophilia. Freud argues that the initial *active* and *passive* antithesis present in the "infantile genital organization," which corresponds to the polarity "between having *a male genital* and being *castrated*," will eventually result in the *male* and *female* categories at the time when "development has reached its completion at puberty" ("Infantile Genital Organization," 19: 145). This distinction between *male* and *female*

nevertheless carries within it the original binary between what is *active* and what is *passive*. Freud says, "Maleness combines [the factors of] subject, activity, and possession of the penis; femaleness takes over [those of] object and passivity. The vagina is now valued as a place of shelter for the penis; it enters into the heritage of the womb" ("Infantile Genital Organization," 19: 145). According to Freud, when scopophilia becomes an end in itself rather than remaining "preparatory to the normal sexual aim," it involves an active and a passive dimension in which the observer is active in submitting the passive object to the power of the gaze through a type of sexual perversion ("Infantile Genital Organization," 19: 145). To masculinity, Freud attaches the active role of observation while femininity retains a passive function in serving as the object observed ("Infantile Genital Organization," 19: 145).

Luardo, inhabiting the role of active observer, fantasizes about breasts while particularly enjoying those belonging to "women who offered themselves to him without question," women who had become his passive objects (Chávez 14). In a similar fashion, Uncle Federico commands passivity, telling Lecha, "Yes, my dear, now keep your eyes closed and relax. Don't peek" (Silko 586). When Lecha had attempted to open her eyes, he "had ordered them shut in a frightening tone" (Silko 586). The males assume active functions in satisfying sexual pleasures, while the females remain passive recipients receiving the action. Producing sexual arousal in the male spectators of their bodies, the females represent not just a visual object, but an "erotic object" (Mulvey, *Visual* 20). Viewing woman as the "erotic object" Castillo extends the definition of the "Other" to male objectification of women in general for their ability to "satisfy" sexual needs, saying, "Objectification…we now understand philosophically as

the ‘other’ of man” (Castillo 128). Though some heterosexual women seek “to be the ‘special’ object of his [the male’s] desire and devotion,” the objectification of the body, the “object of desire,” remains in place (Castillo 128). In *Face*, Minerva and Lourdes readily accept the male appropriation of and desire for their breasts. For instance, Minerva, one of Luardo’s many lovers, would proudly display “her chichis pointed high up to the sky” (Chávez 14). Through the use of her “push-up bras,” Minerva would display the “imposing breasts” in a pleasing manner that had satisfied Luardo so much (Chávez 14). Like her, Lourdes, filling out “48D cup French lace bras that pushed her solid chichis up to just under her double chin,” displays her breasts in ways that reflect her pride in her “great prized possession” (Chávez 176-7). Moreover, indicating her complete understanding of the function of the breast as a site of male interest, she refers to her breasts as “mi atracción, my attraction” (Chávez 176). However, for Delores, the breast tells a different story, one of difficulty.

In a world where women have endured these “distorted aesthetic values of objectification” (Castillo 128), it is no wonder that, for Delores, the breast as a member of her body becomes synonymous with burden and great difficulty, for she suffers under the weight of the very thing that supports Luardo’s objectification and simultaneous comfort in that objectification. As a young woman, she had grown substantially from month to month; she “had increased a notch: from an AA to an A, from a 34 to a 36, from a B to a C, from 38 to 40, and on to a D” (Chávez 19). However, supporting her large chests requires the use of her “harness,” a term she uses to refer to her brassiere. Soveida describes how the breast functions for Delores as a source of physical discomfort. For Luardo, the brassiere “lifted higher and higher [the breasts] like birds in

a tall tree" (Chávez 14). For Delores, the contraption designed to restrict and contain her objects is an additional weight she must bear. Soveida describes her mother's suffering, saying, "She was large-busted, uncomfortable. The straps cut into her shoulders, leaving reddened, indented areas. She was prone to headaches, as well as back and neck problems. Sleep was a dilemma" (Chávez 19). Luardo's comfort in the aesthetic properties of the breasts becomes Delores's discomfort as she bears the burden of patriarchal expectations. He falls asleep to sweet dreams, while Delores experiences difficulty in being able to sleep at all.

In showing how the breast itself functions for both Luardo and Delores, Chávez demonstrates just one instance of the violence against the female body Delores experiences as the possessor of the prized objects. For Delores, this violence manifests itself in the breast of her own body. She tells Soveida, "I know what it's like having some man pinching and punching away at your breasts" (Chávez 20). Dolores's recounted experience with male appropriation of her own breasts is not one of loving tenderness, but of "punching" and violent ownership. Mara, Soveida's cousin, similarly expresses negative encounters with male appropriation of her breasts. For her, the breast serves as an area of torment. In a telephone conversation with Soveida, Mara reminisces about her young adulthood and remembers the developments of her body to be problematic. She tells Soveida, "I was too long and skinny, and then I had bumps and curves before anyone else did, and that was terrible. And I had big flat feet, and breasts. God, I had breasts…The boys pulling and popping my bra. It drove me crazy" (Chávez 196). Even as a young woman, Mara had endured male appropriation of her body. In spite of her own suffering, Dolores passes down to Soveida the preoccupation with size

that she herself has internalized as a result of patriarchal expectations regarding the all-important question of the "size" of her "erotic objects" (Castillo 128). Her mother, concerned about size and increase, tells her, "Now you, Soveida, you have a good-sized bust, with the promise of getting larger, just let you have a child" (Chávez 19). Living between her mother's expected goal that she will acquire appropriate proportions and the Church's mandate that she must protect the breast as a sign of bodily purity, Soveida finds herself trying to understand her own body. She says, "I was indoctrinated into believing that having rounded ample breasts and living in constant fear of having them ripped off was the only way" (Chávez 57). For Soveida, the breast itself becomes representative of the expectations placed upon her as a woman to have large breasts by some inherent ability to control her genetic properties and simultaneously to fear the loss of her breasts, her possession of the comforting "aesthetic values."

Besides making a distinction between active objectification of the body's "aesthetic values" and passive object struggling under the expectations of the spectator, the concept of scopophilia still demands more attention. If castration encapsulates the greatest fear in life for the development of the male psyche, why do male spectators derive such pleasure through looking at a woman, who by her very existence represents a lack of the phallus? After all, Anzaldúa suggests, "Woman is the stranger, the other. She is man's recognized nightmarish pieces, his Shadow-Beast" (Anzaldúa 39). In *Fetishism and Curiosity*, Mulvey addresses this question of woman as "Shadow-Beast" by analyzing how the image of a woman can function not only as the "erotic object," but also as a fetish for the very fear her castrated body presents for the male unconscious (Mulvey, *Fetishism and Curiosity* 20). In order to face the realized fear of

castration, the male often must develop a fetish that will allow him to overcome the trauma of seeing female sexuality. This fetish serves as "a substitute for the woman's (the mother's) penis that the little boy once believed in—and for reasons familiar to us—does not want to give up" ("Fetishism," 21: 153). According to Freud, this substitution the male makes for the castrated woman both consoles him in his loss and simultaneously allows him to continue believing that castration is not real. Concerning the fetish, Freud argues,

> Yes, in his mind, the woman *has* got a penis, in spite of everything; but this penis is no longer the same as it was before. Something else has taken its place, has been appointed its substitute, as it were, and now inherits the interest which was formerly directed to its predecessor. But this interest suffers an extraordinary increase as well, because the horror of castration has set up a memorial to itself in the creation of this substitute. ("Fetishism," 21: 154)

Mulvey says, "While curiosity is a compulsive desire to see and to know, to investigate something secret, fetishism is born out of a refusal to see, a refusal to accept the difference the female body represents for the male" (Mulvey, *Fetishism* 64). Mulvey postulates that looking at the female body feeds the male's desire to believe that the "the woman *has* got a penis, in spite of everything" (Freud, "Fetishism," 21: 154). Mulvey argues that focusing on the beauty of the female body conceals the horror of the castrated mother, saying that "its most perfect fetishistic object [rests] in the image of woman" (Mulvey, *Fetishism* 13). Viewing beauty as a covering that hides reality, Mulvey explains that the beautified female body can function as a fetish by acting as "a

mask, covering over and disavowing the traumatic sight of absence, especially if the 'absence' sets off associations with the wounded, bleeding body" (Mulvey, *Fetishism* 5).

Mulvey argues that film becomes an ideal method of displaying the "image of woman" for the fetishistic male. Similar to how the "psyche constructs a phantasmatic topography, a surface, or carapace, which hides ugliness and anxiety with beauty and desire" in order to develop a sexual desire for that body that simultaneously represents fear (Mulvey, *Fetishism* 5), so film manufactures femininity "into a surface of perfect sheen" to combat the spectator's fear of gazing at the manifestation of the castration threat (Mulvey, *Fetishism* 9). In *Almanac*, the police chief's interrogation videos demonstrate the power of film to act as fetish, for the chief watches videos of the interrogation of a prostitute. During his research, on "the video monitor the young whore's hard, upturned breasts filled the screen in freeze-frame" (Silko 341). In order to complete thorough notes, he "watched the ten minutes of videotape over and over…hitting the pause switch on the videotape deck, rolling close-ups of females' organs across the TV screen" (Silko 341). The police chief even allows an Argentinian filmmaker to sell the interrogation videos and expresses enjoyment at the idea of gaining profits on "the filthy perversions of thousands hopelessly addicted to the films of torture and dismemberment" (Silko 342). The first improvement to the videos the filmmaker suggests is "to use lipstick and makeup on the genitals so they might show up better on the video screen" (Silko 342). Through cosmetics, images of women "conform to a façade of desirability" that captures the male gaze (Mulvey, *Fetishism* 68). Comparing the fetish of the female body to the fetishized commodity in capitalist

production whose commercial surface conceals the labor of its producers, Mulvey states that the female body becomes the necessary object that "glitters" to distract the consumer, or the spectator in film theory, from the reality of what lies beneath (Mulvey, *Fetishism* 6).

The "erotic object" nevertheless becomes quickly discarded when it can no longer represent for men the "promise" of youthful comfort and the opportunity for undisturbed objectification. Castillo notes, "Society *retires* women sexually (due to their loss of reproductive abilities) when they reach middle age, sometimes before they undergo menopause. Middle-aged women are made to feel physically undesirable after years of thinking that any physical desire was unnatural" (Castillo 140). An example of this age discrepancy appears in the changing image of the breast as Luardo sees it in his dreams. Luardo's dreams in which he would enjoy the succor of breasts so "young or ample—always delicious" (Chávez 14) turn into nightmares by 1978. The coveted objects of desire instead become little to be desired. In these dreams, the breasts were "those of an old woman, sometimes deformed, or flaccid, or, most recently, enormous, misshapen, bruised" (Chávez 13). Once these young and inviting breasts metamorphose into "aged" and "leathered" organs, Luardo no longer finds comfort in them and seeks to replace these disappointing dreams with the dream of living in Mexico with a sixteen-year-old girl, who could renew his sexual desires and still maintain the comforting image (Chávez 13).

However, it is interesting to note that Luardo not only rejects the breasts for their age and lack of "aesthetic values," but also expresses fear of them. Soveida describes the appearance of the unsatisfying breasts as a "quite disturbing thing for

him" (Chávez 13). Of this recurring image of aged breasts, Luardo thinks, "There was something horrible about it, nonetheless, as he was reminded of a familiar and very old woman's breasts. He wondered whose they were. His mother's? His grandmother's?" (Chávez 13). It is possible that Luardo's fear that these breasts could belong to his mother or grandmother connects to Castillo's assertion regarding "men's fear of her [woman's] creatrix ability" (Castillo 130). Kristeva also notes male trepidation regarding the reproductive capacities of the female. She observes, "Fear of the archaic mother turns out to be essentially fear of her generative power. It is this power, a dreaded one, that patrilineal filiation has the burden of subduing" (Kristeva 77).

Since the female is "essential for reproduction" (Kristeva 77), Luardo's inability to continue reproducing enticing images of the breast may prompt him to realize that it is the woman who brings forth life, life to him and life to more women with more breasts. Breasts that have dried up would reiterate to man his inability to replace the life-giving "propagation" of the female body, despite his efforts to appropriate it for his own needs (Castillo 130). Interestingly, Luardo's dreams of the breast turn into dreams of a non-reproductive womb. His dreams had "started with the breasts, the old, mutilated ones, and then before he knew it he was moving down to the withered thighs and the hairless vagina and inside to the dried womb" (Chávez 17). Soveida describes Oralia's appearance shortly before her death in a similar fashion. She says, "Her breasts were small and folded inward. Her pubic area was almost devoid of hair" (Chávez 415). Luardo wants these dreams to end, these reminders of his inevitable reliance on the female body to reproduce the "population," as well as the possible termination of the reproduction of breasts for his personal enjoyment (Castillo 130). Castillo argues that

the "conquest of woman" brings with it a desire to control "her wisdom, her cultivated knowledge of propagation, her knowledge of organically regulating the population on the basis of the need of her particular social groupings" (Castillo 130). In spite of his many sexual conquests, Luardo cannot conquer the woman, the "Earth Mother…*Coatlicue* [who] gives and takes away life" (Anzaldúa 68). Instead, the "old crone" in his dreams "would touch herself lasciviously while licking her dried lips and then would laugh in his face" (Chávez 17). If such mockery were not frightening enough, then the woman "would stoop down to take his still stiff organ in her toothless mouth," threatening to absorb him into the dead dryness of her body (Chávez 17).

An even more striking element of Luardo's dreams is the repulsion he experiences at the sight of something that does not conform to his pre-conceived notion of "aesthetic" beauty, for what "had been beautiful, and flawless!" becomes an "aberration of nature" (Chávez 17). These dreams make him wonder, "Was this aberration of dreaming to persist? Was it a portent of things to come?" (Chávez 13-4). Would he not be able to envision the breast of comfort any longer? These breasts "were an offering he could not, would not take" (Chávez 13). According to Cherríe Moraga, Luardo's fear of a female body that does not conform to his expectations would confirm the role of the "abject" body woman assumes in the male mind. In *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness*, she asserts, "In MeXicano terms, women's sexuality has occupied a fundamental site of abjection in the collective imagination…Abjection: debasement, depravation, abnormality" (Moraga 41). In Luardo's case, this abjection manifests itself in his seeing breasts that are the very definition of abnormal. They are "deformed," "flaccid," "enormous, misshapen, bruised," anything and everything that

deviates from his definition of aesthetically normal breasts, which he had seen "[u]p until that point" in his dreaming life (Chávez 13-4). Kristeva explains the effects of the abject on the perceiving individual. She argues that those who experience it suffer from a sense of repugnance upon sight of an image that makes them confront their own mortality. Using the example of a corpse, Kristeva argues that it is not the lifeless body itself that indicates death; rather, it is the realization of our own bodily processes that causes us to come face to face with the thin line separating us from that state, the processes that must function to keep us from being the same corpse. She writes that "refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live" (Kristeva 3). *Almanac* visually places the corpse at the forefront of recognizing death and its permanent separation from life. When Menardo's wife, Iliana, dies, he touches the corpse, the first corpse he had ever touched. The finality of her death leaves him "surprised at the nothingness he felt. Not woodenness or waxiness or cold—just nothingness" (Silko 302). Later, when the bank president's daughter dies in a terrorist bombing, Menardo once again feels compelled to touch the corpse, to experience the deadness of it. However, this time, Menardo struggles to differentiate the dead corpse from his own living body:

> He was not sure he was actually touching the hand, but when he pushed, the corpse's left arm shifted, leaving the right hand alone on her chest with a pink rosary threaded through her fingers. The movement of the left arm horrified Menardo. Everything was supposed to be in its place and remain there. It had frightened him so badly he could not remember what he had felt with his forefinger. He had not been able to distinguish

> the flesh from his own…He could see he was touching the dead girl, but the arm felt as if it were an extension of himself, a strange growth on the ends of his thumb and fingers. (Silko 305)

The non-functioning corpse signifies dysfunction at the same time that it reminds the living of the very functions of their bodies keeping them alive. She says, "These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being" (Kristeva 2).

The horrifying realization of one's not too distant separation from death can manifest itself in many forms. Kristeva argues that we do not necessarily have to see the corpse specifically to experience revulsion at the sight of atrophy. Rather, this disgust can be anything "that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck" (Kristeva 3). Moreover, the abject upsets the areas of demarcation along this "border," breaking down the distinction between the self and the other and thereby disrupting the self-recognition only made possible when the self views its existence as separate from that of the other. The abject, however, causes the border separating self from other, subject from object, to "become the object" itself as the self struggles to answer the question, "How can I be without border?" (Kristeva 4). Luardo's recognition of the border becomes realized upon seeing an object that no longer stimulates desire, for abjection arises from that which "disturbs identity, system, [and] order" (Kristeva 4). The abject threatens the relationship between the subject and the object established at the moment when the subject views the object as the other, a relationship Kristeva associates with the one between infant and mother, for "the plane

of abjection is that of the *subject/object relationship* (and not subject/other subject)" (Kristeva 64). In the same way that Kristeva views a layer of skin on the surface of milk with horror for reminding her of the border, so Luardo views the aged breast with revolt for its disturbance of his pleasant dreaming, for "the sight of her [the female] sends him [the male] into a frenzy of anger and fear" (Anzaldúa 39). However, at the same time that Luardo sees in his dreams the images of breasts he has loved, he nevertheless recognizes his own age, knowing that the breasts reflect his conquests over time (Chávez 14). When he wonders if the aged images signify "a portent of things to come," he recognizes his vulnerability to the decay of his own body and its members, for the dreams prompt him to think, "But now—what was he to do—stop dreaming? He might as well die" (Chávez 17).

In an attempt to protect himself against the inevitable deterioration of the body, he buys insurance to secure his well-being. Soveida notes his commitment to buying many different types of insurance, saying, "He had five basic insurance policies from different companies, one each for fire, flood, earthquake, accidental death, and dismemberment" (Chávez 12). She goes on to elaborate his preparedness for unknown and unforeseen circumstances, detailing his desire to protect himself against "disease, damage, mutilation, and even death" (Chávez 12). Likewise, Menardo acquires a bulletproof vest, which he entrusts with his life and begins wearing every day (Silko 317). However, the vest Menardo believes will protect him ultimately betrays him. After he has a dream in which he is unafraid of a skeleton wearing a necklace of green beads because of the body armor protecting him (Silko 499), he tests the vest, ordering Tacho to shoot him. Still confident in his guarantee against death, Menardo dies while

thinking, “They could examine the vest later for damage, but right now he needed help to stand up. He was getting too wet and cold lying there” (Silko 504). Like Menardo, Luardo “was prepared” to buy insurance, but he “wasn’t prepared for…life” (Chávez 12). Neither buying insurance nor holding onto the dream of living in Mexico with a young girl could protect his body from taking on the same “deformed,” “flaccid,” “enormous, misshapen, [and] bruised” reality of age’s rage on the members of a body. Even the insurance could not keep the “horrible nightmares…desperation and depression” at bay (Chávez 17). By the end of his life, his own body had atrophied to the same state that had caused him such trepidation. Soveida describes his body after the strokes, saying, “He was feeble, wasted. His muscle tone had disappeared. His lips and skin were always dry…His hands were waxy, always cold…What little body hair he had left was wiry, dark, and defiant, like small quills” (Chávez 400-1). Piece by piece, member by member, his body begins to deteriorate, pushing him closer and closer to the point at which the “entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver” (Kristeva 3).

Through the novels’ extreme depictions of the female body and its effects on male spectators, Silko and Chávez guide us to consider an important question: is it not problematic for a woman’s body to serve only two purposes, either that of the object or that of the abject? Either narrative dismembers the woman’s body. Being an object requires the isolation of the woman’s attractive parts; representing the abject transforms the woman’s body into a manifestation of fear. Both texts bring attention to what Castillo calls “the extent of violence that accompanies woman’s reduction to a ‘sexual play thing’” (Castillo 128). If she is visually attractive, the woman becomes useful as

both scopophilic pleasure and calming fetish in a sexual context. When no longer able to satisfy sexual needs, the woman becomes the "subject's fear of his very own identity sinking irretrievably into the mother" (Kristeva 64). At this point, the fear of castration becomes secondary to the fear of losing life, and alterations to the body suggest a possible threat. Kristeva argues, "This is precisely where we encounter the rituals of defilement and their derivatives, which, based on the feeling of abjection and all converging on the maternal, attempt to symbolize the other threat to the subject: that of being swamped by the dual relationship, thereby risking the loss not of a part (castration) but of the totality of his living being" (Kristeva 64). Between these two poles of objectification and abjection, the woman herself suffers the ultimate form of dismemberment, that of invisibility, a form of "psychological violence" (Carraway 1305). Upon first realizing her status as a "plaything, without a voice" to Jester's sexual advances, Soveida describes how she had felt in that moment, saying, "I liked Jester and he had once liked me. But now I no longer existed" (Chávez 119). Patriarchal appropriation of the woman's body severs her identity from that of her body, dismembers her into only the desirable parts, which become horrifying at the point at which they are no longer desirable. Similarly, sitting in a jail cell while waiting for her execution as punishment for treason against the government, Yoeme, talking about the police officers who had arrested her for kicking "dirt in the faces of the police and army," had written words in the almanac Lecha reads in the present day:

> They stand outside my cell and gloat over my death. Soon I "must" die because I had "already lived too long," I have blemished their "honor." Me, "the short, square-shouldered woman with deadly aim," that's my

> title. In twos and threes they come to stare at me. They relish the words they repeat again and again—their daydreams of my hanging and dismemberment. (Silko 579)

Threatening the police officers' manhood, "honor," and dignity, Yoeme had represented the fear they actually had of her. For her crimes, dismembering her, silencing her, would be the only way to ensure their own safety. Her words prompt the question: what can women do to reclaim their bodies and re-member their appropriated, objectified, terrifying pieces?

Rejection

A form of resistance to a phallocentric system becomes rejection of the phallus itself. In *Almanac* and *Face*, female characters express revulsion at the sight of the male body, making it a source of the abject. Silko's novel demonstrates the relationship between the male and the abject through Alegría's aversion to Menardo's penis. On the way to her honeymoon, she becomes disgusted by his phallic organ at just the moment that he begins to fondle her breast. Taking her hand, he "had gently pressed it to the crotch of his trousers so she might feel the strength of his ardor. Alegría felt nausea sweep over her" (Silko 308). The actual honeymoon disgusts Alegría even more, leaving her repulsed at the sight of his body:

> His penis was as short and fat as he was, and it was lost in the overhang of his belly. When he kissed her thighs and inched toward her pubis, Alegría imagined he was a giant mollusk trailing slime over her as he prepared to nose into her vagina. The urge to jerk herself away, to draw her legs to her belly and then to kick him violently was almost

uncontrollable. (Silko 309)

Chávez's novel paints no more of a flattering picture of the phallic organ. For example, Dolores gives Soveida her opinion of the male body, saying, "Men's bodies when they're naked are ugly…When I first saw Luardo encuerardo it shocked me. It was big, like a bull's. Now it's tiny, limp…I don't want to see it anymore" (Chávez 39). Likewise, Soveida expresses disgust at her encounter with Jester's penis. She remembers her reaction to the organ, saying, "It seemed enormous, a rubbery mass I couldn't quite grasp. It was warm, and very hard. I was overwhelmed—embarrassed and aghast and quite nearly sick" (Chávez 119). Moreover, Chata, the housekeeper, characterizes the penis as "even more useless than a breast, or, worse yet, two breasts" and places it in the category of "other useless body parts" (Chávez 212). Lecha in *Almanac* comes face to face with the abject, digging up Uncle Federico's grave. Refusing to rest in eternity in the family graveyard littered with the remains of relatives she disliked, Lecha begins digging up the graves of her dead relatives. The first coffin she exhumes is that of her Uncle Federico, and she disposes of his remains in the trunk of a Lincoln. She exclaims, "Well, well, Uncle Federico, here is all that remains of you and your thick, hairy fingers" (Silko 589). For Lecha, seeing the abject is not a source of fear but one of triumph.

However, rather than focusing only on the male body, the female characters embark on the process of reconstruction of themselves. One female character in *Face* who plays an important role in this reconstruction process is Soveida's grandmother, Mamá Lupita. She tells her granddaughter, "We're taught to shape our bodies into the molds of clothes. Your poor mamá has bra straps that cut into her shoulders. When men

see her, they only think breasts. Soveida, we are more than our bodies or our breasts" (Chávez 449). For Mamá Lupita, the breast is not all there is; it is not the only thing in the world that defines who women are. At a time when Soveida acknowledges her own insecurity regarding "the wrinkles between my eyes already too pronounced…with lines of worry, doubt, and surrender," Mamá Lupita speaks words of liberation to her. Mamá Lupita devalues the makeup women wear to cover up their imperfections, to create a façade of everlasting beauty. She embraces her own age and the appearance accompanying it, saying, "My face is my face. With lines where lines should be, a few hairs where there shouldn't be hairs, with skin the way it should be for someone my age. We rub away, Soveida. I am exactly how I should be. Lived" (Chávez 449).

Instead of fearing the process of aging and dying as Luardo does, Mamá Lupita embraces the very naturalness of the changes that Luardo sees as manifestations of the abject. While acknowledging that changes in the body do occur, saying, "Eyes cloud over…Lips are swallowed and vanish. Eyebrows and eyelashes disappear in childbirth, age spots begin to flourish…Teeth darken, crumble, and become silver or gold twinklings in the unwelcome sea of mouths we don't care to know," Mamá does not see these changes in appearances as an impending border inching her closer and closer to death and decay (Chávez 449). Rather, she tells Soveida, "But we are more than this change…We *become* our mothers, our grandmothers" (Chávez 449). Aging of the female body is indeed a transformative process, but it does not conclude with death and the appearance Luardo finds horrifying. Rather, it continues on into more life as the female takes her place among her "ancestors [who] are near" (Chávez 449). Like Coyolxauqhi, the female body does not cease living at the time of dismemberment: it

lives on in the form of something even more beautiful than its prior state.

Mamá Lupita is not the only woman who helps Soveida to begin seeing the body in liberating terms. Soveida's friend, Sister Lizzie, a lesbian nun, helps her to begin breaking free from the mandates of the Church. Unlike the Church's demands that "women are subservient to males" and that a woman has "only three directions she could turn: to the Church as a nun, to the streets as a prostitute, or to the home as a mother" (Anzaldúa 39), Sister Lizzie demonstrates that other options are possible. She tells Soveida, "Women don't need men to be happy…Not all women need to be completed in that way" (Chávez 439). Moreover, she celebrates her identity as a "feminist lesbian nun" who openly lives a life different from the limited range of options available to her (Chávez 440). Like Anzaldúa, Sister Lizzie also re-appropriates patriarchal religious belief systems and views a female figure as the deity in which she chooses to place her faith. In the same way that Anzaldúa replaces Huitzilopochtli with Coatlicue, restoring her to her former status as giver of life and death, so Sister Lizzie reinterprets the patriarchy embedded in the Church, saying, "I thank the Mother God I'm who I am. My God is a God of possibility and hope. She's not a never-never God. No pinched-nosed, narrow-minded old man touting salvation his way and his way only" (Chávez 445).

Soveida herself also seeks to re-member the body. In a conversation with her daughter about menstruation, Dolores tells her not to think or talk about "dirty" things like the blood that flows out of a woman's body (Chávez 20-1). Her comment reflects the apprehension and condemnation surrounding a woman's cycle, the view of menstrual blood as a "danger" (Kristeva 71). Castillo wonders, "After centuries of being

nullified as mestizas/indias by dominant, invading cultures and the teachings of the Catholic Church, we don't question *why* we are so ashamed of our menstruation" (Chávez 124). However, Soveida asks *why*. She says to her mother, "Dolores, who ever thought of that phrase 'sanitary napkin'? It had to have been a man, because no woman in her right mind would refer to them as 'sanitary.' They aren't a bandage to swab up something dirty. The blood that comes out of me is beautiful" (Chávez 20). Soveida defends the blood of the female body as an appearance of beauty, and rightly so, for it is "the blood that creates life" (Castillo 124). While Dolores wants to ignore "the bodily functions or necessities of being female," the "body fluids" associated with expulsion (Kristeva 2), Soveida views this natural process as something that actually contributes to her "aesthetic value" as a person, calling it "beautiful" (Chávez 20). Although Soveida confronts many different images and interpretations of the female body, she, as an adult, chooses to see her body as something beautiful, in spite of the influences and people in her life who might seek to dismember the body only into its "good" parts. She tells Dolores, "Maybe we'll forget we have bodies that bleed. I don't want to forget I have a body, maybe you do. I don't" (Chávez 21). Soveida stands as a woman who does not want to "forget"; instead, she wants to re-member.

Like Soveida, Lecha wants to re-member. She "wants to transcribe the old notebooks [from Yoeme] and needs Seese to type them into the word processor" (Silko 21). In spite of her work as a psychic for television shows, Lecha begins to concentrate on the task her grandmother had left to her and her twin sister: repairing the pages of the almanac. The pages, composed of skin, live on in the flesh of those who remember them. Lecha remembers; she focuses only on what the "work ahead of them [was]…and

when the work was properly completed" (Silko 100). Her grandmother had left her with specific instructions, saying,

> I have kept the notebooks and the old book since it was passed on to me many years ago. A section of one of the notebooks had accidentally been lost right before they were given to me. The woman who had been keeping them explained what the lost section had said, although of course it was all in a code, so that the true meaning would not be immediately clear…I am telling you this because you must understand how carefully the old manuscript and its notebooks must be kept. Nothing must be added that was not already there. Only repairs are allowed, and one might live as long as I have and not find a suitable code. (Silko 129)

Employing Seese to help her work on the notebooks, Lecha believes that "[c]ertain answers lie within the ragged, stained pages" (Silko 172). The pages allow her to see the past, for she comes across Yoeme's story regarding how an epidemic of influenza saved her from execution, from the dismemberment at the hands of the police officers (Silko 580). The pages also allow her to see the future. She begins making preparations to leave Tucson since the almanac had confirmed that there would be "civil strife, civil crisis, civil war" (Silko 756). Re-membering the pages gives her the opportunity to flee Tucson, taking Seese and the almanac with her. Re-membering the almanac may save her life and Seese's life. Re-membering is what she must do; it is the work ahead of her.

Like Lecha, it is authors like Anzaldúa, Chávez, Castillo, Moraga, Silko, and Harjo who talk about survival, who talk about the pain of indigenous women. These authors have re-membered and shared their stories, shared their voices. Looking at the stark truth of the aftermath of colonialism, Harjo wonders what her place in this world is, pondering, "If I am a poet who is charged with speaking the truth (and I believe the word *poet* is synonymous with truth-teller), what do I have to say about all of this?" (Harjo, *The Woman* 19). As a poet, Harjo believes that her voice must bring forth the truth of the situation. While the speaker in "The Creation Story," the first poem in *The Woman Who Fell from the Sky*, feels "ashamed / I never had the words / to carry a friend from her death / to the stars / correctly. / Or the words to keep / my people safe / from drought / or gunshot" (Harjo 7-15), she does not discount the fact that her words might be able to accomplish something even if they were unable to stop death. Rather than continuing to look at the shortcomings of her words, she begins considering what good her words might be able to do. She states, "If these words can do anything / I say bless this house / with stars. / Transfix us with love" (Harjo 22-25). Words cannot undo the past that the speaker wishes she could change, but she does send her words into the future to see what they can do now. After all, in *How We Became Human*: *New and Selected Poems*, Harjo's book of poetry published in 2004, Harjo reminds us of the power of the poet's word. In "When the World as We Knew It Ended," the powerful poem that closes *How We Became Human*, the world, crumbling piece by piece, is ultimately saved by a poem. The speaker bemoans the coming of the end of the world:

> We heard it.
>
> The racket in every corner of the world. As

> the hunger for war rose up in those who would steal to be president
> to be king or emperor, to own the trees, stones, and everything
> else that moved about the earth, inside the earth
> and above it. (Harjo 29-34)

So what happens when the world ends, succumbing to the industrialization of the "east island of commerce" and the depleted oil, "sucked dry by two brothers" (Harjo 3-5)? What happens in the aftermath of wars started by those in power? Although it is a bleak world consumed by greed, dismemberment, destruction, violence, and abuse, it is not over. The speaker provides a glimmer of hope. She says that "we felt there, beneath us / a warm animal / a song being born between the legs of her, / a poem" (Harjo 49-52). In a world beleaguered "by a fire dragon, by oil and fear. / Eaten whole" (Harjo 6-7), the poem yet remains. Harjo shows how the life of a poem can indeed ensure the survival of the world. A poem, emerging from the body of a woman, becomes a voice in the midst of silence, in the midst of destruction and dismemberment.

Conclusion: Survival

A woman's body appears in the museum. Brain and genitals preserved in jars, displayed in the Museum of Man in Paris—these preserved body parts belonging to Saartjie Baartman, also known as Hottentot Venus, remained visible to the public eye until 1974.[19] This woman died in 1815, but her parts, dismembered from her body, lived a much longer life than she did. Well-known for her exceptionally large buttocks and genitalia, Baartman left South Africa to tour England and France. She performed for numerous audiences, routinely displaying her buttocks to Western people continuously fascinated with her body and size. Presenting a contract that Baartman had supposedly signed, an English doctor and an entrepreneur teamed up to take her to Europe for a series of freak shows starring her body parts. She allowed artists and scientists to replicate her bodily image, but she did not pose as a completely naked model for photographs or scientific studies while she was alive. However, when she died, George Cuvier, a scientist, assumed control over her dead body. Rather than granting her a proper burial, he opened up her body to fulfill his own scientific curiosity. He produced a cast of her body, a replication of her anatomy in full detail. His experiments guaranteed that she would be an exhibit not only in life, but also in death. He removed her skeleton, preserving its entire structure. Then, he removed her brain and genitals from her dead body and saved them for the viewings of future audiences. France finally agreed to allow South Africa to remove the bodily exhibits staged in the museum and provide Baartman an appropriate burial service in South Africa. This burial did not take place until 2002. For her entire life, Baartman remained a public spectacle,

[19]Parkinson, Justin. "The Significance of Sarah Baartman." *BBC News Magazine*. BBC, 7 January 2016. Web. 1 March 2016.

dismembered into the fascinating parts of her body. In death, her dismemberment continued. Paraded as parts and pieces, Baartman lived in a state of dismemberment in life. Moreover, she endured dismemberment in death. People have seen her external body and internal body. Entirely exploited, Baartman lived dismembered. She was a real woman, not a female character in a novel, not a fictional creation. She was a living woman with a dismembered body.

A woman's body appears in a waste container. In April of 2016, investigators found body parts belonging to a divorced mother who had children. Researchers found these parts scattered in various trash bags and receptacles in the neighborhood where the woman's body parts began to surface. Slowly and horrifyingly, police officials and investigators in Seattle began putting the pieces of her body together, collecting fragments and remains, limb by limb. "Human remains found in Seattle on Friday probably belong to a woman whose dismembered body parts were discovered nearby last week, authorities said"—this quote from an unimaginable report of a homicide in Seattle is painfully, frighteningly true.[20] This case actually happened. After going to a baseball game with a man named John Charlton, Ingrid Lyne, a forty-year-old woman, met a horrible death. The *Washington Post*'s report from April 2016 is quite difficult to read or process at all: "On searching Lyne's home, investigators collected swabs of 'suspected blood' and trash bags matching those in which the body parts were found, according to court documents. In the bathroom, they discovered a 15-inch pruning saw, according to the probable cause statement from the Seattle Police Department." A foot, a leg, a head, and an arm appeared in a trash container; authorities found a saw in

[20] Chokshi, Niraj. "Newly Found Body Parts Linked to Dismembered Seattle-area Mom, Authorities Say." *Washington Post*. Washington Post, 16 April 2016. Web. 1 March 2016.

the bathroom. She was a real woman. She worked as a nurse. She had three daughters. She went on a date to a sporting event, and she never lived to see another day, much less another game. The suspected murderer, Charlton, faces first-degree charges for the murder of Lyne. Lyne's daughters will never see their mother again. What remains of Lyne is a collection of body parts that investigators are trying to reassemble. This act of violence is unbearable to witness. How could anyone commit such an abominable murder? How must Lyne have felt as a helpless, powerless individual in pain? How can Lyne's daughters face the reality of their mother's death? How can these daughters have a life not haunted each day by the dismemberment of their mother? Dismemberment is real; Lyne was real. Her bereaved children and their unfathomable pain are real. Lyne will never be a functioning body again; her body remains fragments, broken pieces of her former self. Her heart does not beat, and her blood does not pump throughout her body anymore. The silence of her limbs is deafening, but her body does speak. It tells her survivors that violence against women is a real issue with real consequences forever embedded in the flesh. Her body warns us, tells us to be cautious in a world that is unsafe, especially for women.

Dismemberment provides a nice plot twist on *The Walking Dead*. It comes to the forefront of numerous television shows, movies, and other forms of popular entertainment. Moreover, dismemberment and the fragmented image of the body even play a role in the psychoanalytically born fears of the self and other. This dismembered, fragmented image of the body in the psychoanalytical realm also appears in social situations and cultural circumstances. In addition, dismemberment permeates many modern literary texts and helps readers to visualize resistance as it imprints itself on the

bodies of human beings in various conditions of life. Historically, dismemberment has appeared in multiple forms: slavery, death, mutilation, violence, perception, racism, abuse, and more. Sadly, dismemberment is a real-life experience. Countless people have lost their lives, limbs, and identities to violence that dismembers, destroys, and disorients. Nevertheless, brave women tell us about their experiences. They speak through the dismemberment of the unsafe world. They use memories, bodies, and voices to talk about violence against the body, to discuss fear and the reaction to it.

When we use the word *voice*, many different impressions tend to come to mind. Some people associate the word with one's literal speaking voice, or the distinctive sound emanating from one's lips. Other people might consider the word in terms of tone, distinguishing those who speak at a higher register from those who speak at a lower register. Still others view the voice in terms of singing ability, judging its vocal quality even for entertainment during competitions on television shows. For many women, however, the voice is much more than just the sounds associated with talking or singing; rather, the voice is a tool one can use to carve out a space of existence and create a sense of personal identity. For survivors, the voice can assume the flesh of existence, the means of survival itself. Women from numerous backgrounds have used their voices to raise awareness for the cause of supporting, protecting, and encouraging women who face oppression.

Elise Johnson McDougald, an African American educator and activist, discusses the power of the African American woman to resist dismembering, unflattering presentations of her mind and body. In spite of a history of slavery, economic hardships, violence, and physical, as well as emotional dismemberment, African Americans speak

and share their experiences. They can achieve their goals and demonstrate resistance. McDougald herself was an example of resistance. An important educator in Harlem, she fought for "progressive era social reforms, teacher union organizing, and civil rights work" during their educational careers in Harlem (Johnson 223). She was born in 1885 to "Dr. Peter Johnson, one of the first African American doctors in New York City, and Mary Elizabeth Johnson, a British woman who had immigrated from the Isle of Wight as a child" (Johnson 229). McDougald was the first African American to graduate from Washington Irving High School (formerly Girls' Technical High School), and she became New York City's first African American female principal in 1935 in spite of the Board of Education's discriminatory policies (Johnson 229). An accomplished woman, McDougald gives hope to African American women. In her essay "The Task of Negro Womanhood," she states:

> We find the Negro woman, figuratively struck in the face daily by contempt from the world about her. Within her soul, she knows little of peace and happiness. But through it all, she is courageously standing erect, developing within herself the moral strength to rise above and conquer false attitudes. She is maintaining her natural beauty and charm and improving her mind and opportunity. She is measuring up to the needs of her family, community and race, and radiating a hope throughout the land. The wind of the race's destiny stirs more briskly because of her striving. (McDougald 108)

McDougald squashes a view of the African American woman as threatening castrator, as Moynihan's dangerous matriarch. In spite of challenges, difficulties, discrimination,

and relentless obstacles, the African American woman is a beacon of courage and steadfastness. McDougald upholds women for all that they accomplish for "family, community and race." She praises women for their contributions to society. She attributes to women the possibility of hope and power to create a better tomorrow.

McDougald is a strong voice of resistance, but she is certainly not the only one. For female authors speaking back to systems of oppression, poetry can serve as a form of resistance to a history of violence. In her book of poetry, *Travelling Mercies* (2001), Lorna Goodison, a Jamaican poet, points out that artistic forms of resistance have the capacity to create healing. Goodison discusses Caribbean methods of resistance to English perceptions in *Travelling Mercies,* using frank poems to speak back to Western assumptions regarding colonized people and to a white imposition of a historical reality onto a group of people who took no part in writing the books that supposedly chronicle their existence and who suffered the violent effects of slavery and colonization. In "What We Carried That Carried Us," she points out that song and story functioned as forms of resistance and survival in the midst of horror and bondage. She says,

> In bars of destruction, story functioned as talisman
> against give-up death, cramped paralysed darkness
> Remaining remnant tasting all of life, blood, salt,
> bitter wet sugar. Ball of light, balance power,
> pellucid spirit wafer without weight, ingested,
> taken in as nourishment, leaven within the system.
> Remnant remaining rise now. (Goodison 5-11)

Goodison's speaker calls to the survivors of a tragic and horrifying past, saying,

"Remnant remaining rise now" (Goodison 11). In the midst of the wreckage, she calls to those who remain, asking them to come forward, to express their pain and to evidence their survival. In the aftermath of "destruction," "darkness," and "blood," Goodison focuses on "story," "life," "light," "power," and "remaining." Her poetry exposes the ugliness of colonization and exploitation, but it also paints an image of hope and persistence rising from the rubble of a cruel and ugly world.

In "The Circular Dream," an interview with Laura Coltelli, Joy Harjo, attributing great power to the voice in writing, asserts, "Writing helped me give voice to turn around a terrible silence that was killing me. And on a larger level, if we, as Indian people, Indian women, keep silent, then we will disappear, at least in this level of reality" (Harjo, *The Spiral* 62-63). Harjo inspires Indigenous American women and all women to find a way to speak. For Harjo, this way of speaking found its outlet in poetry. Crediting poetry as the particular type of writing that gave her "a voice, a way to speak" (Harjo, *The Spiral* 43), Harjo uses her poems to examine how the voice is not one unit; rather, it is a multifaceted entity that can carry with it more than one kind of identity, more than one filter with which we interpret the world. Nevertheless, in a society where the search for one's own voice can be daunting in the midst of those who would seek to silence voices in any way different from their own, Harjo's poetry, inspired by her own personal experiences with forced silence, shows us that the search for one's own voice, for one's identity in this world, can be both joyful and painful, restorative and destructive, rewarding yet difficult.

She Had Some Horses, Harjo's seminal book of poetry, depicts the voice as an instrument of empowerment that can be transformative. For instance, in "The Black

Room," the speaker is describing a dark situation in which a woman, dreaming violent dreams, wakes up to discover that "Joey had her cornered. / Leaned her up against / the wall of her room, in black willow shadows his breath / was shallow and muscled and she couldn't move / and she had no voice no name / and she could only wait until it was over" (Harjo 23-27). While it is unclear whether the woman is dreaming or indeed "woke up" (Harjo 1), the morning gives way to a voice, "some voice / within her other being—a dream or / the history of one of the sky's other stars" (Harjo 35-37). Because of the voice, "she opens herself for the dark" (Harjo 38) even though the black "horses are slow / to let go" (Harjo 39-40). In this poem, being voiceless in the fear of night transforms into strength that next "morning [when] she thought she woke up" (Harjo 34). This strength causes the woman to face the darkness consuming her body and transporting her to a place of fear. This strength allows the speaker to face a new day, a day after the fear of abuse has attacked her. The voice within her fights against the frightening silence by which the spirit of darkness, whether that is a literal or figurative "Joey," seeks to consume her. Having experienced these night demons herself and conquered them through her own fight for the voice that comes in the morning, Harjo reveals, "One night…I struggled in a sweaty, anxiety-ridden sleep. I was running, and then I was cornered in a white room. I could not find my voice. In all the years of the chase, I had never come to this place" (Harjo, *Crazy Brave* 161). Fighting the monster in her dream, Harjo awoke and began writing a poem (Harjo, *Crazy Brave* 161). For Harjo, the voice that came to her arrived in the form of "the spirit of poetry who reached out" to save her from silence (Harjo, *Crazy Brave* 163). She had conquered "all the fear" within herself and used poetry to push back that fear (Harjo, *Crazy Brave* 161),

much like the speaker in "I Give You Back," the closing poem in *She Had Some Horses*. Having reclaimed herself from fear's clutches, the speaker's voice asserts, "I take myself back, fear. / You are not my shadow any longer. / I won't hold you in my hands. / You can't live in my eyes, my ears, my voice" (Harjo 37-40). In this poem, the voice escapes fear and instead becomes something the speaker protects from the impending fear.

Harjo weaves into *She Had Some Horses* this hope and defense against fear she discovered through her poetic voice. While life may be bleak, the voices we hear can show us the way if we choose to listen to them. Another of the book's poems, "The Woman Hanging from the Thirteenth Floor Window," embodies this idea that we must decide what voices will determine our path. Will it be the monster embedded in our dreams or the spirit of poetry that carries us forward? In the poem, a woman, deciding whether she will plummet to her death or clasp onto life, "hears voices" as she hangs from the window (Harjo 33). Some of these voices "come to her in the night when the lights have gone / dim" (Harjo 34-35). Other voices arrive in the form of "little cats mewing and scratching / at the door" (Harjo 35), while some come from "her grandmother's voice" (Harjo 36). Some of the voices she hears come from "gigantic men of light whispering / to her to get up, to get up, to get up" (Harjo 37-38). Finally, some voices come to tell her what to do about her place at the window. While some of the voices "scream out from below / for her to jump" (Harjo 42-43), she also hears other voices "cry softly / from the sidewalks" (Harjo 43-44). The voices she eventually decides to listen to will determine her fate. Although whatever voices she has chosen to hear up until this point have led her to the window, voices can now save her from

"listening to her own life / break loose, as she falls from the 13th floor / window on the east side of Chicago" (Harjo 63-65). With the power of these voices, she "climbs back up to claim herself again" (Harjo 66) or ends it all. We do not know what the woman chooses to do with these voices, but Harjo reveals the decision she made: "I followed poetry" (Harjo, *Crazy Brave* 164).

Like McDouagld, Goodison, and Harjo, still other women use their voices as a way to speak back to structures seeking to silence them and stifle their progress. In 2015, Lena Dunham, a well-respected actress, director, and writer in Hollywood, spoke about her experience as a survivor of rape. At a Power of Women event, Dunham openly discussed the pain and fear she experienced because of the sexual abuse that has forever impacted her life. At the very beginning of her speech for the luncheon, Dunham stated: "When I was raped, I felt powerless."[21] Because of this powerlessness, Dunham has worked as a passionate activist for the rights and protection of women and advocated for a world in which women support women in surviving forms of violence. In her speech to the Power of Women luncheon sponsored by Variety, Dunham strongly asserted that "connecting with other survivors reopens our world. Instead of scrambling for power by silencing other women, we're able to mutually strengthen each other through collaboration and support." This speech for her audience at Power of Women stressed the importance of giving a voice to this experience that many women conceal with masks of shame, regret, and embarrassment. Experimented on, bullied, exploited, dismembered, and battered, many women face incredible oppression, even in the twenty-first century. Many women have heard that they are stupid, that they are ugly,

[21] Bahadur, Nina. Lena Dunham Gave a Powerful Speech about Sexual Assault." HuffPost Women. The Huffington Post, 27 April 2015. Web. 2 March 2016.

that they have no value, that they cannot pursue their dreams. Many women have been discriminated against, judged by the color of their skin, silenced, and threatened. Many women have been beaten, raped, killed, and molested. Dismembered into body parts through objectification, sexual abuse, and horrific violence, far too many women face scars permanently etched into their minds, bodies, and souls. Dunham has loudly voiced her support for women who are dealing with these kinds of life-changing experiences surrounding physical, emotional, and mental violence, saying,

> I felt my value had been determined by someone else, someone who sent me the message that my body was not my own, and my choices were meaningless. It took years to recognize my personal worth was not tied to my assault; the voices telling me I deserved this were phantoms; they were liars. So as a feminist, and a sexual assault survivor, my ultimate goal is to use my experience, my platform, and yes, my privilege, to reverse stigma and give voice to other survivors. (Dunham)

Sexual violence dismembers women, leaving them scarred and broken. Dunham speaks out so that women will know that they have support from women who have shared the same experiences. Moreover, women can learn from women with experiences different from their own as many cases and conditions of dismemberment affect women all over the globe in various ways. If we as women do not speak out against the violence of women, who will? Who can relate the experiences of women more accurately than women? We must expose the incredible dismemberment that threatens the body. We must speak for women and the experiences of our bodies. We must use our voices to discuss the reality of dismemberment and encourage women to

find support from other women and to voice the feelings, emotions, and memories associated with any form of abuse. We cannot forget the horrifying realities that women have endured in their bodies. Women ranging from Saartjie Baartman to Ingrid Lyne deserve to have their stories told. They demand our sympathy, respect, and attention for the dismemberment they have endured. We cannot ignore the silence of their limbs. The silence has grown too loud, and we can hear it. We should hear it.

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